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LENTEN
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Gift from Rev Virgil Genesier



LENTEN SERMONS.

BY

PAUL SEGNERI,

Of the Society of Jesus.

VOLUME II.

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LOAN STACK

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PREFACE.



THE sermons contained in this second volume will, it is thought, be found fully equal to those published in the first, two years ago. It is needless to say anything in praise of these discourses, for their fame is well established; and we trust that sufficient pains has been taken in their translation to make them, in their present form, give a good idea of what their power must have been coming from Segneri's eloquent lips.

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SERMON I.

THE FEAR OF GOD FROM THE SENSE OF HIS POWER.

"And when He was come into Jerusalem, the whole city was moved, saying, Who is this? . . . And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all who were selling and buying in the temple."—
ST. MATT. xxi. 10, 12.

1. I KNOW not from whence it came, that all the world, under its sad old state of delirium, should have preferred the worship of gods who were vile and mean-spirited, to that of those who were noble and generous. Only review, in your minds, my hearers, the various nations of forlorn heathenism. You will see that each emulated the other in the adoration, paid by it, to a multitudinous set of senseless deities—of stones, that could not move, of stumps, that could not speak, of metals, that could not hear. This went so far, that in Egypt you could scarcely find a common peasant, who had not his own gods growing up in his garden. He had only to take his mattock, and he could raise them; for every leek, springing up there, was a new deity; every onion was a fresh object of worship. That truly was a fortunate time for brute beasts, and, particularly, for those of the baser sort, when lizards and grubs received more distinguished honor than eagles and lions. What animal indeed is there more grovelling than a beetle? Yet a beetle was regarded by the people of Syene, as their favorite god. What more clumsy than a tortoise? Yet a tortoise was worshipped by the Troglodites. What more

stupid than an ox? Yet an ox was worshipped by the inhabitants of Heliopolis. What more offensive than a goat? And yet a goat was worshipped by the inhabitants of Mendes! Whence, my hearers, did all this absurdity arise?

Do we not all know the vast influence, in other respects, of pride, among men? How then was it, that they were not ashamed to prostrate themselves before a rabble of such vile, misshapen, and disgusting little brutes as these? Actually on their bended knees they would burn incense on the altars of those very animals, whom in their walks afterwards they crushed under their feet. The solution of this question, if I mistake not, is not so very difficult. All these idolaters were men of most abandoned lives; and since the common instincts of nature obliged them to recognize some Divine being in the world, they naturally preferred being subject to a god, who, however contemptible, was yet weak, rather than to one, who, however noble, was yet strong. The Divine power is a sore object of hatred to wicked men. They will adopt any god, provided he be one of slow perception and incapable of taking vengeance. This was exactly the dream of the foolish Marcion. I am supported in my opinion by the authority of Theodoret, who maintained that it was on this account the Philistines adored the fly, as being an animal unclean and loathsome, it is true, but to the same extent harmless and volatile. They reckoned upon their being able to commit every sin with impunity, while they had a god, who was so entirely in their own power, that, were he to cause them the least annoyance, they could banish him with the wave of a fan, or a shake of their finger, or a puff of their breath. Hence, what, when alive, they could blow away in a moment, when transformed into an image they called a god. If,

peradventure, in this our day, we have ever countenanced any such crazy delusions, as these, let us unlearn them. The God, whom we worship, is not, ye sinners, a god of that senseless character, that ye would attribute to Him. He is well able, in spite of you, to do far above what you would have Him; and therefore it is your part and duty to respect and fear Him. For have you not observed His behavior this morning in our Gospel? The people are curious to ascertain, "Who is this?" What then does He do? Without any delay He lays His hand upon His weapons; He rebukes them; He scourges them; He fills every soul with alarm; and thus He convinces them of His power to command their respect, after they had dared to carry their outrages beyond His own person to the walls of His Sanctuary. What therefore will ye do, in order to escape His mighty arm? Where, ye unhappy men, will ye find your place of concealment? where your refuge, so that He may not overtake you? Far better for you to follow the advice I now am ready to give you, which is this: on no account depart from this Sacred building without having first acknowledged with fear and trembling the power of your God. Reflect with me this morning on the brutish stupidity of every sinner, while he has no fear,—(who would believe it?)—to stand up in arms against the Almighty. For, as Job declares, "He hath stretched out his hand against God, and hath strengthened himself against the Almighty. He hath run against Him with his neck raised up."*

2. In truth, are we not all struck with horror at beholding Christ in this Gospel, how, with nothing more than a simple rod of small cords in His hand, He routed the

* Job xv. 25, 26.

multitudes, overturned the benches, scattered the animals, and filled all the Temple with confusion, all the city with alarm? We justly look upon that power, as being greater than any other, which by the help of weaker means can effect its object. Were I to tell you, by way of example, that the brave Samson was able with the mere lifting up of his spear to keep at bay a whole army of Philistines, you would surely think him a man of mighty power; but, if I were to tell you that he was able to do this with the help only of a sword, would you not think him possessed of a power still more mighty? and of mightier and mightier still were I to tell you of his doing the same with a wooden club? But if, advancing still further, I should tell you that he accomplished all this with the mere jawbone of a dead ass, then your estimate of him would rise proportionately high, and you would be disposed to smile at those pretences to what men call power, which are so much lauded in the princes of this world. To consider, indeed, such persons powerful only because we see them go abroad preceded by many thousands of horses and soldiers, of spearmen and fusileers, is quite a mistake. All this is rather a sign of their weakness. We would admit them to be powerful in the true sense of the word, if, like Samson, with a jawbone in their hands, they could march against the combined forces of the enemy, slaughter them, disperse them, and throw them all into confusion and disorder. For, just in proportion as any power can produce the greater effects by means of the weaker instruments, must be the degree of the intrinsic value which it possesses. Now, this is that very power which shone so miraculously in our God: and therefore, according to the judgment of S. Chrysostom, God gave us to understand His true nature after a most magnificent fashion, when, having to subdue

the haughtiness of the Egyptians, He subdued it, not by having recourse to wild beasts which are the terror of the forests, but by those paltry reptiles which are the scum of the fens. "A truly grand spectacle did God exhibit to the whole universe when He beat down the pride of the Egyptians, not with lions and bears, but with frogs and flies." Granting this to be so, come near, ye who are Christians, and just tell me, whence arises that pride of spirit which prompts you at times to provoke God? From whence proceed all your exceeding boldness and your fearless presumption, so that, instead of ceasing from the affronts you offer Him, you are induced to heap upon Him fresh indignities?

3. It is not, however, of so much importance to me that I have your own confession in this matter. Of mine own self I discover plainly enough what it is which adds to your boldness in sinning. It is commonly your abundance in worldly goods, and particularly your great riches. Nor is this surprising. Money is that which ultimately everything else subserves. "All things obey money." * Solomon has long ago settled this point for us; and hence it is, ye moneyed men, ye who have found out this truth by long-continued experience, that ye come to say among yourselves—"What can I possibly want? I have it in my power to order matters just as I like. Do I wish to gain such a lawsuit? That attorney will do my pleasure. Do I wish to gratify my passion for that young female? She will do my pleasure. Do I wish to take revenge of my enemy? That hired assassin will do my pleasure." And thus you rise up audaciously against God, fearing no evil because you abound in money, to which all earthly good

* Eccles. x. 19.

is obedient. "The substance of a rich man is the city of his strength, and as a strong wall compassing him about."* But perceive ye not that, while your money commands everything else, it does not command Him who is the Lord of your money? Suppose God to have a design to level with the dust a certain tower, as lofty as you please to make it. Does He, in your opinion, require some pieces of ordnance for this purpose? You have your property, most of you, in farms or in enclosed land, and, therefore, exposed to the open day. Tell me; must God, in order to deprive you of such possessions, renew the wonders of the preceding century, when He rained down stones in Bologna, or of this present century, when He has rained down lead in Buda? So far from this being necessary, He can carry His will into effect by the most insignificant means; for instance, by what He did to Achab, that is, by withholding the rain in its season; or by despatching the particles of hail, or the thin mist, or the tiny insect, to attack your crops. Any dense troop of caterpillars or locusts that He may commission to march against you will suffice to reduce you to beggary. And what famous conspiracies has He not utterly defeated by such poor, weak, little troopers as these? Not only did He by their instrumentality drive the Canaanites out of their land, that He might plant in it His own people, but by the same means He subdued a Persian army, led by Sapor their king, under the walls of Nisibis, and routed another army of the Franks, encamped with Charles their king, near Girona. And is He not able to devastate your few inches of arable land by the same means? Question the historian Diodorus as to the dearth which was occasioned in Media by a set of poor little sparrows. Ask

* Prov. x. 15; xviii. 11.

Sabellius what a desolation was brought into Thracia by the most diminutive frogs ; Cromerus, what havoc was caused in Masovia by the lightest grasshoppers ; Pliny, what waste was introduced into France by the pettiest flies ; Sigonius, what famine was produced in Italy by the meanest caterpillars. And from these instances you will be able to inform me whether God has it not in His power with a mere trifle to render you miserable.

But perhaps your property may not be invested in land ; and therefore you laugh at all fear of drought, inundation, vermin, and wild beasts. In what, then, is it invested ? In bills of exchange ? but how deceptive they are. In mortgages ? but how liable to fail they are. In trade and in commerce ? but how full of hazard they are. For is the vessel, in which you ventured to embark your merchandise, so independent of God, as not to require of Him any favorable winds ? Forsooth, it must cost Him wondrous toil, either to grant it a prosperous voyage, or to dash it in pieces on a rock, or to strand it on a sand-bank, or to let it fall into the hands of the corsairs ! Ye then, who traffic on the waters, how can you dare provoke God at that very critical time when the bulk of your property goes floating on the wide sea ? Did you know it to be already reaching the port, not even then should you dismiss your apprehension. For, as Tertullian observed, God is wont to reserve nigh unto the shore His hidden undercurrents and His calms, whereby to cause shipwreck. How much more fearfully exposed must your vessel be, far out at sea, where God retains in His service such mighty storms, and billows, and whirlpools, and rocks, and sea monsters, and hurricanes, where **" He breaks the ships of Tharsis with a vehement wind."***

*Ps. xiv. 6.

Proceed we further. If He gives an order to the least spark of fire, are not all those houses on which you raise your rents, immediately consumed? If He commission the pestilential vapor, are not those flocks and herds from which you derive your income, immediately infected? If He speak the word to the subtle penetrating damp, does not your standing corn immediately rot in the ear, and the grain perish on which you built your hopes of a more abundant harvest in a season of prevailing scarcity? Even if your dollars are closely lodged in the chest, placed under the guardianship of iron bars and of steel hinges, you must not consider them beyond the reach of Him, who, as on this day, with a scourge of small cords "overthrew the tables of the money-changers." Oh, simpletons that ye are! Oh, how great your delusion! A lawsuit in which he may engage you against any one, an enemy, a calumny, a quarrel—how rapidly may these consume your wealth? Ah! He had the best of reasons to tell us by the mouth of His Prophet, that all the gold and all the silver belonged unto Him. "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine."* And yet, knowing this so well as you do, you can still be ready to provoke Him. Only tell me. Did any potentate keep under his own lock and key all your riches, just as Joseph had the control over the riches of the Egyptians, so that it should be entirely at his disposal whether you should have them or lose them, could you ever be guilty of so great a folly as to brave his displeasure, or openly to pick a quarrel with him? And yet, you will quarrel with God? Oh, what blindness, infatuation, and insanity! It is from the fact of your being possessors of great wealth that you take occasion to offend Him. I tell you, that on this very account,

* *Agg. ii. 9.*

because you are possessors of great wealth, you ought to respect Him the more. If you were poor, you would be liable to one punishment the less; but, being rich, you are thereby capable of receiving one punishment the more; which is, you may be reduced to poverty.

4. But come, I will grant that God permits you to continue in the entire possession of your income; yet how easily can He deprive you of the advantages which arise from it! Riches surely are not to be coveted merely for themselves, but, as the philosopher teaches us, for the fruits we reap from them, such as honor, friendship, advancement, connections, entertainments, divers pleasures: and does not God equally bear all these fruits in that hand of His, in which St. John saw "the seven stars"; in other words, those seven planets that dispense them to mankind? Were I to speak particularly of each of these advantages, the detail would be too long. I will mention, however, one, that comprehends all the rest. Are you not all quite convinced that health is the life and soul of every other blessing? "There is no riches above the riches of the health of the body," says Ecclesiasticus.* To what avail do you possess your fine villas, your beautiful gardens, your magnificent palaces, if, chained down to a sick-bed, like King Asa, you are never in a state to enjoy them; but are cut off from every source of consolation and relief, save that of having your doctors holding their consultations about you? All the benefit of our earthly goods consists, not in the possession, but in the use of them. And accordingly the same Ecclesiasticus decided that "Better is a poor man who is sound and strong of constitution, than a rich man who is weak and afflicted with evils."† For a poor but healthy

* Eccles. xxx. 26.

† Eccles. xxx. 24.

man has at least a relish for the pittance he earns ; whereas a rich but sickly man finds no enjoyment whatever in the abundance he possesses. Were then God to allow your orchards to teem with the most delicious fruits, your vines to burst forth with the most luscious grapes, and your preserves to be well stocked with all kinds of the most exquisite game, it would profit you but little, did He, on the other hand, so derange your organs of taste, that these delicacies would prove to you rather unsavory than otherwise. Let God only strike some acute pain into your head, and what pleasure can all your book-learning afford you ? Was not Angelo Poliziano a most learned man ? Yet there was a time with him, when his books afforded him so little gratification, that he wandered about his house, knocking his head against the walls ; so excruciating were those spasms he felt shooting through his temples. Let God only make way for the formation of a frightful cancer in your lungs, and what pleasure can all your power afford you ? Was not Herod a most powerful king ? Yet for years he derived thence so little satisfaction, that he was on the point of laying bear his bosom with a knife, so sharp-toothed were those worms, which, like as in a state of fermentation, came forth from his bowels. You would, forsooth, have a rare enjoyment of those soft, well-shaken feather beds, those splendid couches, those gaudy tapestries, should your lot resemble that of the ill-fated Mæcenas, who for three successive years could not prevail upon sleep, even for a single night, to close his eyelids. What more shall I say ? A slight attack of fever alone suffices to render the happiest Prince in the earth miserable. Hence, St. Augustine emphatically observed, " Human pleasures are only counterfeits ; and, such as they are, the least indisposition of the body can rob us of them."

But you will say to me: Is it not *your* body, rather than ours, which is liable to all these ailments? Well; I must grant it; you are young, you are hearty, you are strong. What then? However vigorous your health be, must God endure hard toil and labor to deprive you of it? Is not a cough enough to do this? Is not a slight humor enough? Is not a stone enough? How then can you pay Him so little regard, just as if you never knew that "health is in His wings,"* and consequently that with a gentle flap of those wings He takes health from one and gives it to another, and so retakes and restores it again? Oh, ye heavens! I see that a judge among men can manage to strike terror into the minds of the wicked; and how does he do it? He lets them see his many various instruments of torture, his dreadful apparatus of punishment, and all the power he has to chastise them. And cannot God then terrify us with the vast appliances and means He possesses: those diseases, which He lets us see so constantly arrayed against us in the pains, and infirmities, and many various degrees of malignity, under which the enfeebled bodies of our friends or relations from time to time are sinking around us? And yet, no human judge has for any convict torments at all comparable to these. At the utmost, the sufferings such judges can inflict are limited to a certain period, which is fixed by law: but those, coming from the hands of God, sometimes extend beyond the reach of years, and, by reason of their continual daily pressure, are frequently found so intolerable, that many sufferers have in their despair preferred a violent death to such a life of prolonged misery. Tell me then; if the bodily evils be so many, so diversified, and so severe, by which God can avenge

*Mal. iv. 2.

Himself for the insults we offer Him, is it not the height of folly to treat Him with so little respect, or rather with so much petulant animosity?

Certain people really seem, as if they imagined themselves composed of such solid materials, that nothing, short of the most deadly weapons, could penetrate into them. Now I only wish that God would give them some near insight into their bodily frames by rendering them for a short time transparent, like glass. This would enable them to discover at a glance the many hundreds of bones, muscles, nerves, veins, fibres, arteries, cartilages, which form the component parts of the body. Is there one among you, who would not be shocked to see with what facility a system, so complicated as this, might become deranged? You will be disposed perhaps to smile, when I mention the case of a certain oddity, who was under a full conviction of his having been transformed into glass, and who, in consequence, reclined for years on a couch of the softest down, never daring to move, but crying aloud to people, even at a distance, for mercy's sake not to touch him, unless they wished to break him in pieces. For my part, I am more inclined to weep, when I reflect that we, who are more brittle than glass, should yet fancy ourselves strong as bronze. It was often wisely observed by S. Augustine in his discourses, that "glass, though in its own nature most fragile, yet only needed careful keeping to last long": whereas man, however vigilant and whatever care he may take of himself, must needs perish. Many indeed have met their deaths in various ways from the most trivial causes and seeming accidents. And dost thou not fear for thyself? And dost thou not tremble? And dost thou not, besotted man, entertain some respect for One, who is so powerful? And "that God" (as Daniel most emphatically

speaks on this subject)—“that God who hath thy breath in His hand, hast thou not glorified?” *

I remember to have read, how a certain wild Indian, named Munatama, was falsely accused before Vasco Nuñez, one of the conquerors of that country, of the flagrant crime of high treason. The poor wretch pleaded, as well as he could, in his own defence; but in vain: wherefore, in conclusion, by way of summing up all he had said, he threw himself at the feet of that celebrated warrior, and with much dignity of action placing on the hilt of his sword his trembling hand, briefly in these words exculpated himself from every charge. “And is it possible, that you could ever suspect me of having entertained any idea of doing you harm, so long as you carry at your side that mighty weapon, which with a single blow cuts a man in two?” Thus wonderfully did the savage, taught in the mere school of nature, plead his cause; for it appeared to him to be quite an impossibility, that one, like himself, who, agreeably to the customs of those parts, went about naked, with nothing more about him than a wooden scimitar, could ever invite a quarrel with a man, who was always armed, and who knew perfectly well how to manage a sword of steel. Ah! my dear Christians, come nigh, and answer me. Can you then entertain any idea of inviting a quarrel with God, as if you knew not the vast difference that subsists between you, the vilest worms, that creep on the earth, and Him, who is the absolute Monarch of the universe? Something beyond a sword of steel has He at His side! As many lightnings, as are in the clouds; as many savage beasts, as are in the woods; as many poisons, as are in the weeds; as many whirlpools, as are in the

* Dan. v. 23.

waters; as many flames, as are in the fires; as many quicksands, as are in the earth—these are all His weapons, wherewith He is able to beat down our proud presumptuous spirit; and still you do not fear Him? If, on His simply giving the word of command to a cough, to a fever, to a cancer, to a humor, you are dead men, what would be the effect of His commissioning thunderings and lightnings, hurricanes and earthquakes? To cast down poor puny man with engines so stupendous, as these—is it beyond the power of that great God, who, if He touch the mountains, behold them turned to ashes; if He rebuke the sea, behold it dried up; if He upbraid the sun, behold it extinguished; if He forsake the earth, behold it utterly undone? Oh, how well is this expressed in Job: “I have seen those who work iniquity perishing by the blast of God.”* Have you noticed the words? He does not say by thundering, or by casting forth lightning among them: no; “by the blast of God.” For, if it so please Him, God can with a single breath at once put an end to us all. “With the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked.”†

5. We may go further: because God not only has it in His power to take our lives with the most gentle breathing of His lips, that is, with the utmost possible facility; but He can just as well do this at the very times, which are the most inopportune, and the circumstances, which are the most untoward imaginable. Tertullian affirms that God can make Himself feared, whensoever He pleases, by determining our death; but chiefly so, by determining it at those times when we desire most the prolongation of life. “Death,” he says, “comes upon us much more violently in proportion as it finds us in the greater enjoyment of

* Job. iv. 8, 9.

† Isa. xl. 6.

worldly applause, honor, satisfaction, and pleasure." How now in this case, ye profligate young men, can you dare so highly to offend Him by assaulting that virgin innocency? Or ye, greedy traffickers, by accumulating those heaps of money? Or ye, ambitious statesmen, by getting yourselves into that office? Or ye, unwise parents, by forming that family alliance?—when only by snapping asunder one single thread God can defeat your long-woven projects at the very time when they most promise you success? Who can recount the immense hardships, endured by Bibulus the Roman senator, in order to procure the vain distinction of a Roman triumph? Oh, how many deaths did he carry with him from Rome to people of other lands; some on the wings of poisoned arrows, some on the points of the sharpest swords! But lo! at the very height of his boasting, God knew how to devise a way of turning it into the shadow of death. And did it tax His strength to do this? It was quite enough for Him to appoint death to meet Bibulus on his entrance into the Capitol; death, too, not necessarily armed with all the destructive engines of war, but with a mere common house-tile in its hand. Would you believe it? A common house-tile, while he was ascending the Capitol, fell on his head, struck him dead on his triumphal chariot, and thus converted his laurels into cypress, his joys into sorrow, and all that most festive holiday scene into a funeral. What meaneth it then, ye sinners, that God, as possessing so great power, can instil into your minds so little fear, that not only you scruple not the least to offend Him, but sometimes can even plume yourselves on this very account, like those, of whom Job speaks, who "boldly provoke God"? *

• Job xii. 6.

I confess that, with all my revolving the matter over and over again in my mind, I find myself quite unable to discover your ground of self-security. "O, father," I shall be answered by some of this ungodly class of persons, "don't trouble yourself to take any more pains about it, for we will at once tell it you. We too at first stood in mighty awe of that power, which you have so strongly impressed on our mind this morning; and therefore we took great care not to commit any daring sin. But afterwards our experience helped us to dismiss all such fear; because in the course of time, by way of test, we did commit a sin, and yet in consequence of it, we didn't suffer any calamity. Then it was that taking courage we added new sins to our old offences; we advanced from fornication to incest, from spite to revenge, from foolish talk to blasphemy. And yet, we live; we have our farms, and they yield us fruit; we have our children, and they multiply around us; we have our friends, and we stand well in their opinion; and even if we have any enemies, they know how to respect us. On what ground then can you expect us to stand in awe of that power, which, if it be so formidable to others, is in no wise formidable to us?" Not formidable to you? Dost Thou hear, O my despised God? Dost Thou hear all this arrogant talk, and yet dost Thou endure it? See here the fruits of Thy forbearance and long-suffering. "Thou hast been favorable to the nation, O Lord. Thou hast been favorable." And what hast Thou got by it? "Art Thou glorified?" Quite the contrary. I must apply to you Isaias's words. "Thou hast removed all the ends of the earth far off."* Where then are those thunderbolts, which you waste to so little purpose,

*Isaias xxvi 15

now against the senseless tower, now against the consecrated temple? Is it not right that you should spare and reserve them for the ungodly? Otherwise, wherefore dost Thou command us Thy preachers that we should declare the terrors of Thy mighty arm, if Thou failest to carry them into effect? By this you cause us all to be put to shame, to be found liars. I can now quite enter into the feelings of Thine ancient prophets, those Jonahs and those Jeremiahs, who manifested so great a repugnance to engage in their ministry, for fear of becoming a laughing-stock to the heathen. I too hoped to have produced in the hearts of these sinners some deep impression of fear towards Thee; but, as far as I can discover, they are likely to return home more emboldened than ever; and my lot, who am every day "proclaiming devastation,"* will be to get laughed at for my pains. Yet, fool that I am, why do I utter such vain words against God, who is so wise and so orderly in all His dealings? Well then, ye sinners, let's arrange our differences. I am quite willing to grant all you say. Up to the present time God has not punished you. He has rather granted you prosperity. Is it not so? Very well; come, what do you now infer from this? Have you less cause to tremble for the future? I deny it; I deny it. I conclude quite the reverse; it is on this very account you ought to tremble and fear Him the more. Listen; for I wish to prove this, not from any probable arguments, but from what is clear and certain, that I may thereby save you from error.

The fact of God's not having punished you up to the present time, according to your deservings, can only arise from one or other of these two causes—either from His

* Jer xx. 8.

having remitted your punishment, or from His having postponed it. It cannot be ascribed to any other, than these two circumstances, at least by any Christian man. Let us suppose then that He may have remitted your punishment. You ought therefore the more to fear Him, because the more He has forgiven you, in regard to the past, the less probable it is that He will forgive you in regard to the future. And do you not well know that patience when it is long abused, becomes fury? God truly is merciful; but He is also just. "The Lord is sweet and righteous."* Since then His mercy has thus far discharged its office, it will now be the time for His justice to take effect. "For what sort of a God" (as Tertullian inquires) "would He be, were He to command duties without the design of rewarding our obedience, or to prohibit sins, without the design of punishing our disobedience?" And what kind of a Ruler would he be, who should be always pardoning and never punishing? Correction is the chief guardian of all human laws; that, which makes them respected; that, which promotes morality; that which is the main prop of government. And, as frequently to abate somewhat of their strictness, shows a compassionate and kindly disposition, so on every occasion to do this would indicate an unmanly weakness. Therefore, in proportion as God pardoned you the more in times past, so much the less will He pardon you for the time to come.

But if, as is far more probably the fact, God has not remitted your punishment, but has rather postponed it, to be inflicted either in this life, or in the life to come, then the fact of His not having up to the present time avenged Himself of you should be so far from increasing your bold-

*Ps. xlv. 8.

ness, as to increase your fear; for this looks as if He will take His vengeance of you in a lump, once for all. And what then will be the full outpouring of His fury, if such be the first early drops? The scanty streamlets, while apart from each other, could do but little; but, when united, what havoc they spread around! The small sparks while detached from each other, were almost harmless; but, when conjoined, what a conflagration they stir up! The soft breezes, when disunited, were inoffensive; but, when gathering their forces together, what a tempest they occasion! How appalling then will needs be that final outburst of the wrath of God, like "an overflowing scourge,"* since even in its first manifestations it has already proved so fearful! . . . By continuing in your sins, you are only adding fresh supplies to that vast reservoir, of which Ecclesiasticus spake, "As a flood hath watered the earth, so shall His wrath inherit the nations that have not sought after Him."† But *when* will the time be? When will this vast reservoir empty itself upon sinners with such dreadful impetuosity?

THE SECOND PART.

6. No one can know for a certainty, when that time will be, which God has appointed for the exercise of a vengeance, terrible in proportion as it is delayed. This must depend upon the secret disposal of those judgments, which "the Father hath put in His own power."‡ For even the very heathen could say, "The gods have feet of wool." Hence, they step so softly over thy head, that, with thy utmost attention, thou art not aware of their approach. Notwithstanding, if with any probability we may infer the future

* Isa. xxviii. 15.

† Ecclesi. xxxix. 26.

‡ Acts i. 7.

from the past according to the famous saying of S. Jerome, "Things future are known by things past," I think we may designate the very hour, with some probability at least, if not with certainty. Attend, that you may know when that hour will be. All among you must well remember the wonderful manner in which the city of Jericho was assaulted by the soldiers of Josue. He had given orders that, during the space of seven mornings, they should carry the Ark in circuit round the walls, that the armed troops should go before, that the unarmed people should follow after, and that the Priests, every time of their going the round, should cause the trumpets to sound. This was accordingly done; and precisely on the seventh day, at the sound of those trumpets, the walls fell down and the city was taken. Permit me now, in my own way, to offer a few weighty observations upon this victory, generally so well known. The first morning, when the besieged people of Jericho beheld from the top of their walls that imposing array and heard those trumpets, what a terrible panic must the poor souls have suffered! They must have fancied that the soldiers were even already deploying for the attack, even already leaping on the ramparts, even already scaling the very battlements. But, when they soon afterwards perceived that all this noise was followed by no practical effect, they must have begun to breathe a little more freely. The second morning, when they witnessed a like repetition of the same performances, their fears must have assumed the form of surprise; not one among them being able to comprehend what was the meaning of this clamorous demonstration, that all ended in nothing. The third morning their surprise must have degenerated into a disposition to smile; as was natural to people, who now knew by repeated proof that the whole assault vented itself

in empty sound. But then, the fourth morning, and the fifth, and the sixth, when the besieged had more thoroughly recovered their spirits, only conceive what must have been the laughter, the ridicule, the hisses, and the shoutings, with which they saluted the enemy from their heights. I can quite realize the scene to my mind. "Yes," they in all likelihood exclaimed, "these fine trumpets of theirs sound beautifully. Take notice of their new invention for taking cities, not by the force of battering trains, but by the effect of sound! Blow on merrily by all means; for, while you are blowing, we can be dancing. Why, what, in all seriousness, do you mean by this? To frighten us out of our wits by your noise, when you are unable to subdue us by your valor? We are none of those big, stupid birds, who are brought down from their nests by mere dint of clattering noises. If you have the hearts of men, take the trumpet out of your mouth; come on, sword in hand; and then we'll believe you." Thus with every possible insult they may have cried aloud from their walls during those days. But, if at any time their fear must have been at the lowest point and their raillery at the highest, it was, if I mistake not, on the morning of the seventh day, preceded, as that day had been, by so many circumstances, calculated to embolden their minds under a feeling of their security. And, behold, it was on that very morning that the entire overthrow of their city took place. "And when in the seventh going about the priests sounded with the trumpets, . . . the walls forthwith fell down."* Now you will conceive, whether this overthrow was not all the more terrible from its being the less expected. The wretched inhabitants find themselves with a smile on their lips, when behold their bastion walls on a sudden tumbling down, their towers

* Jos. vi. 16-20.

falling headlong, and themselves too involved in the dreadful crash. And then—what with the groans of some who were wounded, of others who were mangled to pieces, of others who were smashed under the ruins—one simultaneous universal outcry of distress must have deafened the air and affrighted the very stars. The Israelites in the meantime, each soldier at his proper post, pushed forward intrepidly over the gaping breach, and making their way over the bodies of the enemy, buried before they were dead, advanced with their pikes lowered and their swords drawn. Taking different directions, they penetrated into the private dwellings, and scattering on every side blood, on every side havoc, on every side death, they quickly reduced the city to complete desolation.

7. We will now return to our subject. What was it you wished to learn from me, my dear sirs?—The time when destruction shall overtake the wicked? Do you know when it will be? Why, when it overtook the people of Jericho; which is tantamount to saying with the prophet *Isaías*, at the time when they were least thinking about it; “Whose destruction shall come on a sudden.”* For it is a reasonable thing that the wicked should be apprehended at that very crisis, when, more regardless of God than ever, they either disbelieve His threatening, or ridicule His power, and therefore are most at ease in their sins. Behold then the zealous Priests of the Lord, who, with the trumpet of His Divine Word, prepare to lay siege to the obstinate stronghold of the human heart. They sound, they threaten, they announce far and wide the fast approaching overthrow, conformably to the order every preacher has received from God: “Cry, cease not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show My people their wicked doings and

* *Isa. xxx. 13.*

the house of Jacob their sins." * The ungodly, on their hearing the preacher for the first time, begin to feel greatly alarmed; they immediately arm themselves against the assault by praying: they put themselves in an attitude of defence by receiving the Sacraments, as if they saw the destruction even now already at their doors. The destruction, however, does not come: and so, on their hearing the preacher for the second time, as he sounds out the same alarm, they convert their fear into surprise, and begin to say within themselves: "What do these men mean by their keeping up every day this useless disturbance?" The third time, they convert their surprise into derision; and from derision they pass on to contempt, and from contempt to disdain, and from disdain to mockery: and then openly at their clubs and their casinos they discuss the latter among themselves. "They hear the words of the Lord," as Ezechiel has it, "and they turn them into a song of their mouth." † For, as by way of counterpart to the words of the zealous preacher, they say, "Did you hear how skilfully he blew his trumpet? What, pray, do these men aim at? to frighten us out of our wits by scolding us and clamoring against us? Well, you, if you like, may believe them: as for me, I have been long accustomed to hear them dealing out the same threats, and for ever harping on the same string; and yet I find it all ends in nothing but a most intolerable brawling. Where are all the heavy judgments he announces to us? 'Where is the word of the Lord? Let it come.' ‡ Where are all the diseases? where is all the beggary? To my seeming, we are more comfortable and more jovial, than other people are, who believe in these preachers."—Oh, yes! these other people you allude to—

* Isa. lviii. 1.

† Ezech. xxxiii. 31.

‡ Jer. xvii. 25.

they are miserable? Are they? Well, well; only wait, for now is the very time for you to prove what you say. At this very time, when your incredulity has attained its height, even then you shall see what was the meaning of that preacher's voice, what the message of his sounding trumpet. In the midst of your merriment the wrath of heaven shall fall on you; and, when you perceive how all of a sudden such irrecoverable ruin has overtaken you, "Alas! alas!" you will exclaim, "we are lost and undone! See the blood, see the slaughter, see the havoc, see the desolation, see the flames, see the plagues, see the death!" And amidst such outcries as these, stunned and stupefied, you will terminate your lives, condemned, so to speak, even before you die. Do you refuse to believe this on my word? Turn quickly to the Sacred Scriptures and consider. When did Baltassar, the King of the Chaldeans, trace that fatal handwriting on the wall which foretold his death? * At the time, when, least fearing it, he was sitting at a most gorgeous feast with his concubines, and was drinking with studied insult out of the rubied cups, those spoils of conquest stolen from the Temple. When did Nabuchodonosor hear that voice sounding from heaven, which condemned him to the wild woods? † At the time, when, least fearing it, he was walking amidst his flattering courtiers, proudly expatiating on the success he enjoyed with so much magnificence in his sins. When was Antiochus, King of Syria, struck from heaven with that intolerable disease, which goaded him on to madness? ‡ At the time, when, least fearing it, he was ascending his chariot and threatening, in his insufferable pride, the same desolation to Jerusalem, which he had so fully heaped upon other

* Dan v.

† Dan. iv.

‡ 2 Mach. ix. 9.

cities. When did Sennacherib, King of the Assyrians, receive from an Angel that final defeat, which caused the loss of his whole army? * At the time, when, least fearing it, he was daringly and insolently blaspheming the power of God, as unable to deliver Israel out of his hands, hitherto accustomed to so many victories. Jezabel, Queen of Israel—when did she see fulfilled the tremendous denunciation that she should be devoured by dogs? † At the time, when, having got the better of her fears, or at least suppressed them, she stood shamelessly in her splendid attire at the window, in the hope of strengthening herself by means of a new marriage in her unlawful possession of the throne. After the same manner we may run through the catalogue of those sinners, on whose heads the fulness of God's wrath was poured out at one decisive blow. You will find this befell them just at the time when they gave no heed whatever to it in their recklessness, or, when they were even turning it into ridicule in the height of their audacity. And, if we partake of the same sin, why should we not equally share in the same miserable end? Yes, yes; The Apostle resumes the subject. "When they shall say, peace and security"—("peace" now, "security" hereafter)—"then shall sudden destruction come upon them . . . and they shall not escape." ‡

8. Let it then be a settled point, that our God is not a brutish God, such as the heathens of old loved to have; and, seeing that with a small scourge of cords only, that is, with the most insignificant weapons, He is able to take such fearful vengeance on sinners, and in so many ways, let us learn hence to stand greatly in awe of His power. But, if He has hitherto abstained from punishing, this

* 4 Kings xix. 35.

† 4 Kings ix. 33.

‡ 1 Thess. v. 3.

should not diminish our fear, but rather increase it: for either He has remitted the punishment, and then we know that after long forbearance His severity will become more inexorable; or, He has postponed it, and then it is clear that after long delay His vengeance will become more terrible. And surely, if ever we ought chiefly to fear Him, it is precisely at that time, when continued prosperity either causes us to forget, or inclines us to despise the Day of solemn account and reckoning.

SERMON II.

THE UNDERVALUATION AND NEGLECT OF THE SOUL.

"When an unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeketh rest, and findeth none."—ST. MATT. xii. 43.

I. THERE was once a time, when people thought they had performed a wondrous feat, if they could only secure themselves from the attacks of the numerous wild beasts inhabiting the gloomy forests or the verdant plains around them. Their care was simply confined to this; to avert all danger of being strangled by bears, torn by wild boars, bit by serpents, or stung by scorpions. We are disposed at the present day to smile at the very moderate degree of courage possessed by our ancestors; so far have we outstripped them in our spirit of daring enterprise and bold adventure. We have not been content with getting rid of every possibility of danger from these animals; we have managed to enlist them in our service. We have nobly discovered the way of clothing ourselves with their skins, of nourishing ourselves with their flesh, of making their very bones useful, and of turning their poisonous venom itself into antidotes against disease: so that it will be found on inquiry, that many more men's lives are now preserved, than used once to be destroyed, by means of these wild beasts. It is precisely in this way that we should treat the devil, who is unquestionably the very worst beast in the world, "an evil beast."* But what

* Gen. xxxvii. 33.

good, you will ask me, can be got out of him? The very greatest, be we only willing. It is simply this; from him we shall learn to value our souls. So jealous is he over our souls, that, according to the declaration of Christ, when he finds them snatched out of his hands, he allows himself no rest; he strives with the utmost toil and anxiety to recover them. "When an unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeketh rest, and findeth none." And what if he should succeed and recover them? Does this not at all pain us? Only consider how studiously he labors to get the possession of our souls. He winds round about us with his devices, as he did round Eve; he assaults us with calamities, as he did Job; he bewitches us with his tricks, as he did Judas; he tempts us with his glozing caresses, as he did Christ; he pursues us, he adapts himself to us, he flatters us, he offers us the most munificent gifts. We, on the contrary, will be at no trouble whatever for our preservation. Ah, dearly beloved, and is it then possible we can so deceive ourselves? Not to value our souls! Not to value our souls! Not to desire to escape damnation! Oh, let me yield for a moment to my feelings, let me deplore so extraordinary a negligence; and try to sympathize with me, for, if you will listen, this negligence will also seem most grievous to you.

2. If any worldly business weighs much on our minds, one very obvious sign of it will be our talking about it, our reasoning over it, our asking and inquiring how we may get guided and assisted in it. Jacob, setting out to seek Laban in a strange country, is really anxious to find him: he makes particular inquiries of those shepherds, who he thinks can inform him.* Joseph, setting out to seek his brethren in a desert

* Gen. xxix. 5, 6.

place, is really anxious to find them ; he eagerly questions the wayfaring man, from whom he hopes to receive tidings.* And Saul, leaving his home on no higher errand than that of recovering a few stray asses, belonging to his father, simply because he was sincerely anxious about them,—what means does he not adopt, what hardships does he not encounter, what attempts does he not make, in order to find them ! Would you believe it ? He does not think it enough for this object to scale mountains, to cross plains, to pursue his unwearied course through various towns ; he does not hesitate even to apply to an oracle for some favorable intelligence, to consult a prophet, a prophet, too, of no ordinary rank, yea, one eminent, yea, the very chief, Samuel himself. “Come, let us go to the seer.”† What say you, then, my hearers ? Can you bring yourselves to believe that the business of your Salvation really weighs upon your minds, so long as you never take advice on this important matter, never hold any consultation about it with intelligent and learned men ?

St. Luke relates that the hearers of the Baptist, being alarmed by his preaching, felt an anxiety for their salvation, unknown to them before, springing up in their minds ; and hence they went in pursuit of him among the caverns and asked him, “What shall we do ?”‡ The common people went to him and asked, “What shall we do ?” The publicans went to him and asked, “What shall we do ?” The men of war, even they in a like state of anxiety, went to him and all asked, “What shall we do ?” Now speak the truth : Have you ever asked of any one in good earnest, “What good shall I do that I may have life everlasting ?”§ Sometimes, it is true, and none will deny it, you make your

* Gen. xxxvii. 16.

‡ St. Luke iii. 10.

† 1 Kings ix. 9.

§ St. Matth. xix. 16.

appearance in a sacred secluded cloister; but then with what object? 'Tis to enjoy the pleasure of the garden, and to talk with one of the holy men about the triumph of the Tartars, the defeat of the Transylvanians, or any news which may come from Ireland. But, as to any serious inquiries about the best way to save your souls, I am not aware of any instance of your having ever compelled a single monk to turn out of his cell for such a purpose. Yet what wonder you should consider this matter so little and discuss it so seldom, when even among yourselves you are not in the habit of fixing your thoughts upon it? He, who is harassed and anxious about any worldly business, cannot prevent his thoughts, however much he may wish it, from continually recurring to that subject. He seems like the stricken deer, that, wherever it goes, carries along with it the arrow that gives it pain. The man thinks of it by day, and thinks of it again by night; he has it even present to his mind, when he lies buried in profound sleep. Accordingly, Cicero tells us of Themistocles, the great Captain of the Greeks, that even when asleep he bitterly envied his rival Miltiades the trophies he had won: and so, Plutarch relates of Marcellus, the great Captain of the Romans, that even when asleep he sternly defied his enemy Hannibal to single combat: and so others, actuated by some vehement emotion of the mind, were wont even in their sleep to give it some spontaneous expression; precisely as we read of Solomon in Sacred history, that, when demanded of God in a dream what gift he would choose, "Ask what thou wilt that I should give thee,"* he made his petition exclusively for wisdom, because this was the constant and only subject of his waking thoughts. "Wherefore I wished, and un-

* 3 Kings iii. 5.

derstanding was given me." * How then can you pretend to any earnest anxiety to secure your everlasting salvation, while you suffer whole days, not to speak of nights, to pass over your heads without giving it the slightest consideration? And since, when you are asleep, your minds will revert to the various amusements and pleasures of the world and of its jovial society—(so Micheas intimated, "They work evil in their beds," †)—how much less, when you are awake, can you ever once feel your thoughts powerfully drawn up to high and heavenly things?

3. But, although you conclude that the total absence of all thought about your souls clearly evinces your little anxiety for them, yet there is a sign even more evident than this. It is to think of them, and yet not to care for them. And do I not plainly see that the service of the soul is made subordinate to every other interest, and that, as if it were the less important or the less pleasing thing to be attended to, it is invariably thrown into the background, and deferred to the last? Yes, yes, too clearly do I perceive this; and oh, that I had eyes to lament it, as I have eyes to see it! Such a person among you is deeply convinced that his soul is laden with sin; he knows it, he feels it, and, while he ponders the imminent danger that surrounds him, he is forcibly smitten, as it were, in his conscience by a call from Heaven, seeming to say, "Go, wretched sinner, go and inquire for some priest, and make your confession to him." "Go, show thyself to the Priest." ‡ What reply does he make to this call? "By all means; I am quite resolved to go and unburden my soul to him. But when shall it be? This very day?—Why, to-day I am invited to that agreeable party. I'll go to-

* Wisd. vii. 7.

† Micheas ii. 2.

‡ St. Luke vi. 14.

morrow.”—“This morning it’s right I should hear **Mass**: I will do so; that is, if there’s time to spare for **Mass**, after I have conferred with my solicitor about the lawsuit.”—“This morning I should get good to my soul by hearing the Lent sermon. I will go; that is, if there’s leisure for it, after I have settled my accounts at that mercantile house.”—And so you go on talking in like matters, always wishing to pay attention to the interests of the soul, if there be only spare time left for it—wise for to-morrow. And is this your notion of being in earnest?

Eliezer, the renowned servant of Abraham, after a tedious journey, reached Nachor, a city of Mesopotamia, from whence he had to bring back one of the family of Bathuel, as a fit spouse for the youthful Isaac. No sooner was he recognized and hospitably received, according to custom, than the people crowd about him, each anxious to show him some token of respect: one would help him to unload; another would conduct him to a room; another, seeing him faint from the fatigues of the journey, would run to bring him some immediate refreshment, before supper was ready: “And bread was set before him.”* How, think you, did he treat their hospitable preparations? “Not so quick, not so quick, my friends; take no trouble, I beg, on my account: for I solemnly assure you that I will not taste a single morsel, until I have first delivered my message. ‘I will not eat till I tell my message.’” Accordingly, not waiting even to lay aside his travelling dress, he gets up to make a long statement and detailed report of the circumstances, relating to his journey—the desire of Abraham, the good qualities of Sarah, the primogeniture of Isaac, the ample riches of the family, the conversation

* Gen. xxiv. 33.

which had recently taken place at the well between himself and the courteous damsel Rebecca, the water, which she had drawn for him, and the gifts, which he had presented to her. What more? He was determined at that first meeting to hasten on to a favorable conclusion the business, so prosperously begun; in a word, to settle the marriage: nor did he cease, till it was said to him, "Behold! Rebecca is before thee, take her and go thy way, and let her be thy master's son's wife."* "But why all this apprehension, thou noble servant? Dost thou fear, lest time should fly, and the opportunity escape thee? or, lest there should be some negotiation already in hand to bestow Rebecca elsewhere? I am certain thou canst entertain no such apprehension. Wait a little then, take some slight refreshment, accept our civilities, and do justice to the hospitality we show thee: afterwards, when thou hast rested and recovered thy strength, attend, as thou wilt then be better able to do, to the matter, which so much presses thee." What is it, they ask, that he should wait? Ah! the anxiety he feels to execute his master's commission will never allow it. The thing most urgent must in the first place be attended to; and therefore it is quite impossible for him to rest or take food. "I will not eat, till I tell my message." In saying this he proves, as Liranus well observes, that he really has at heart the trust confided to him. If this be a true remark, judge for yourselves, whether the regard you bear to your souls can be called an anxiety on their account, while you not only make them give place to the necessary refreshment of your body, but to your idle pastime, your frivolous, your unprofitable amusements? Is there one among you, who ever says to

* Gen. xxiv. 51.

himself, "This morning I have committed a sin: well, then, until I have discharged my soul of its deadly infection by confession, 'I will not eat.'"—"I have defrauded that poor man of his due: until I have first got him out of his difficulties by paying him, 'I will not eat.'" "I have defamed the character of that competitor of mine: until I have first repaired the injury by retracting my words, 'I will not eat.'"—"I have violated the discipline of the Church and treated my spiritual Superior with pride, disrespect, and contumely: until I have first humbled myself before him, acknowledged my fault, and professed my purpose of amendment, 'I will not eat.'" Oh, my brethren, where is the man among you, who conducts himself in this way, and who does not rather mind his worldly business and his carnal gratifications in the first place, before he ever once thinks of settling his conscience in matters of religious obligation?

4. But I forget myself. What am I saying? Is it not a fact that many defer all serious reflection to their old age, and postpone it to such time, as when languishing in death they can scarce retain their spirits within them, and are drawing nigh to their very last gasp? Can it be doubted but that this anxiety must amount to indifference? not to say, that it is their very least care, or no care at all? You do not act thus in your temporal concerns. Have you to bestow a daughter in honorable wedlock? you take the first opportunity. Have you to obtain some proud distinction for your family? you take the first opportunity. Have you to enlarge your estate? you take the first opportunity. Have you to bring some lawsuit to a close? you take the first opportunity. Have you to prove your title to a property? you take the first opportunity. And why all this hurry? Can you not defer the settlement of such matters

to your death-bed? Unquestionably you can; but you refuse to do this; for, you say, matters like these require a clear head, leisure time, fixed attention, and prudent arrangement: whereas some have found a single moment quite enough time to save their souls in. Ah! Christians, how can you possibly utter such folly as this? Oh, what detestable words! what outrageous nonsense! what a reply for a Christian to make! But grant what you say: you cannot deny me this, that it is, at the least, extremely hazardous to defer the salvation of the soul to the last moment, and that such a course is not alike successful in all cases: where it succeeds in one, it fails in a hundred. It is not impossible for a man in his last moments to repent. The truth of this proposition is allowed by that famous Doctor, Scotus; but he adds, "Yet this is extremely difficult on the part of man, and on the part of God. It is difficult on the part of man, because he is become more hardened in his sin; and it is also difficult on the part of God, because He is become more roused in His indignation." What token, in the meanwhile, of your anxiety is this, to prefer the risk of your eternal salvation to risking the marriage of your daughter, or the aggrandizement of your family, or of the interests of your farm, your lawsuit, or your property? This would be to set aside that most sure rule of Eucherius, "Salvation, as being our principal concern, ought to demand our principal care and attention."

Such was not the lesson taught us by the prudent Jacob.* Listen to it; for it is most excellent. Jacob was in the act of returning with all his family to Canaan, there to settle down again after his long self-banishment twenty years ago, when he fled from the violent and implacable

* Gen. xxxiii.

wrath of Esau, his eldest brother. When he was approaching his journey's end, behold this very brother advancing against him with a troop of four hundred brave men in his rear. Poor Jacob at once surmised that Esau, still harboring in his mind the ancient grievance, was now coming to take vengeance on him; a vengeance tardy indeed, but so much the more grievous and severe, as it would now no longer fall on himself alone, who was the offender, but on his beloved wives and his dear innocent children. At such a crisis, what did he do? He immediately distributed his family into separate bands, after the fashion of a little regiment of soldiers. In front he placed the two handmaids, Bala and Zelpha, with the four children he had by them: Lia with her seven children he placed next: and hindmost he placed his beautiful Rachel with the lovely child Joseph, her single blooming offspring. Now, I ask, what did he intend by this particular arrangement? Did he mean to meet the attack? to close in the battle? Or rather to sustain the shock of Esau by virtue of some more gentle and constraining power? For what could a helpless band of women and children avail against a set of ruffians, the very sight of whom was enough to frighten them to death? Well did Jacob know that all resistance on his part was utterly hopeless. Therefore, if he must die, he will, at least, take thought for the best, and by no means expose to an equal danger persons not equally dear to him. His handmaids he esteemed the least; accordingly he put them in front, to stand the first shock. Lia he esteemed more than his handmaids; accordingly, he took more pains for her safety. Rachel he loved still more than Lia: accordingly, he labored still more for her preservation. "He put the handmaids foremost," writes Oleaster, a famous commentator; "so that the less objects of his love might have to endure

first his brother's anger; hereby teaching us that we ought to adventure what we love least, in order to preserve by such means what we love most."

Strengthened by such authority, how shall I speak of you, my brethren, when I observe that, whatsoever the risk be, your soul is the very thing you first expose to danger: just as if to stand in front, to be on the extreme edge of the battle, was its proper place? It is the soul, that in your estimation occupies the position of the handmaid; it is the soul that must venture on the forlorn hope, in order that you may preserve your credit, may preserve your property, may preserve your profane amusements; in order that your children, in order that your parents, in order that your friends, in order that your impure female connections, in order that the very horses in your stable and dogs in your kennel may not suffer any damage. Oh, what folly! Oh, what madness! Oh, what brutish stupidity! "I am full of the fury of the Lord." Let me find some outlet to my feelings. "I am full of the fury of the Lord; I am weary with holding in."*

5. Nevertheless, there is more still to be said. Jacob, it is true, placed his handmaids the first in danger; yet it does not follow from this that he cared so little for them, as to do this willingly: he only did it, when the danger was unlooked for and quite inevitable: for it was not Jacob, who advanced against Esau, but Esau, who advanced against Jacob; and hence all escape was out of the question. But you treat your souls far worse than the Patriarch did his handmaids, while you not only put them foremost against such perils, as you meet contrary to your will, but actually yourselves thrust them into the very teeth of danger. Just as if you had a liking for what does them an injury, you expose them

in societies, where the greatest temptations to sin abound, where evil spirits are, so to speak, not lying in ambush, but with bare arms and in open fight warring against souls to drag them captives into perdition. I say no more about anxious concern for your souls: is this, I ask, paying them even common attention?

6. Forlorn mother of the young pilgrim Tobias! She had intrusted him to the care of an angel, whom she fully believed to be none other than some man of distinguished benevolence and extraordinary wisdom. Notwithstanding, in her passionate fondness for her son, she soon repented of this step; and, deeming him to be anything but safe from some terrible disaster on his journey, she was "very sorry," she sighed, she wept, she groaned; "Woe, woe is me, my son, why did we send thee to go to a strange country, the light of our eyes, the staff of our old age, the comfort of our life, the hope of our posterity? We, having all things together in thee, ought not to have let thee go from us." * Such were the constant lamentations of this wretched creature; nor was it of the least use that her aged husband tried to raise her spirits by assuring her that the man who was the guide of her beloved son in his journey was most trustworthy; that she might therefore fully rely and rest upon him. "Hold thy peace and be not troubled: our son is safe; that man with whom we sent him is very trusty." All this was utterly unavailing: it yielded her no comfort whatever. Every day, like one almost frantic, she left her house, traversed the different quarters of the city, visited all the gates, if by chance they would bring back her son. Sometimes she took her station on an elevated piece of ground in the suburbs, and thence

* Tobias 1. 4, 5.

looked all round in the fond hope of being able to recognize him and to welcome him home. But, when this failed, she renewed her complaints, redoubled her expressions of sorrow, and in the evening returned home completely disconsolate. "Ah! most certainly," she would exclaim, "my son is in some great danger. It may be that at this very moment he is dashed over some precipice, and even now is lying at the bottom of it crying aloud to his mother, to come and help him. Peradventure he is mangled by some ferocious beast, and is now upbraiding his mother, as the cause of his death."

My dearest sirs, every one of us ought to guard his soul with such an intense feeling of jealousy, as not even to venture to intrust it to an angel, unless quite convinced of his being an angel, having well examined his outward gorgeous apparel, lest some fraud should lurk within. "Believe not every spirit," was the advice of St. John, in an affair of so much consequence, but "try the spirits whether they be of God." * What then shall I say, when I observe how many there are, who intrust their souls to the very devil himself, who hand them over to him, as their guide, who suffer them to be led blindfolded over terrible rocks and precipices; to be conveyed to those lewd resorts of impurity and licentiousness, which, if I may so speak, border upon hell! Must I say that these persons have any love for their souls? that they care for them? that they value them? that they treasure up all their happiness in them? Ah! were it so, never would they so desperately consign them into the hands of the devil; no, not even to any man would they commit them in this reckless manner; they would not *believe every spirit*. How then? Had

* 1 St. John iv. 1.

they to procure a companion, their first concern would be that he should be a decided enemy to vice. Had they to attach themselves to a master, their first care would be that he should be a firm friend to virtue. For a spiritual guide, they would prefer the man of deepest learning; for a theological teacher, the man of deepest piety; for an adviser in general, they would cling to the man who was most thoroughly honest: and by such methods they would always seek to ensure, as far as they possibly could, the safety of the soul. But alas! how many do the direct contrary to all this, and, if I may apply to them the words of Jeremias, "give their dear soul into the hand of her enemies." * For not only have they the greatest liking for those companions, who are most dissolute, and those masters, who are most licentious; but even in matters of conscience, when they have to consult a spiritual guide, they look out for one, who is most likely to speak peace to them in their sins. Do they require a theologian? they choose the least orthodox, that he may favor their view; or a counsellor? they prefer one personally interested, that he may flatter them. Oh, what an awful thing! "They give their dear soul into the hand of her enemies." And call you this an anxiety to be saved? Alas! it seems rather to be a desperate anxiety to perish, in spite of the assistance which is offered you; a perverting your helps into hindrances, your supports into stumbling-blocks, and your very antidotes into deadly poison.

Solomon in his Proverbs lamented to find some persons so grossly infatuated, that they could "lie in wait for their own blood, and practise deceits against their own souls." † Who are these persons? Who are they, but the very mis-

* Jer. xii. 7.

† Prov. i. 12.

erable men whom I am now describing—the men who take pains to ensnare themselves by the delusive hope of being able to quiet their conscience on the warrant of certain persons having no conscience at all. How blinded ye are! If they value so little their own souls, how can you think they will worthily esteem yours? But this, as I said before, is the very thing you are aiming at; to hand over your soul to one who cares nothing about it, to let it out on a venture, to let it perish, to let it go to utter perdition. By such conduct you confirm anew what is asserted in the Book of Wisdom; you prove man to be no other than a heartless self-destroyer: “A man killeth through his malice his own soul.”* Oh, woe, woe is me! Who will give me eyes to pour forth an impetuous flood of tears, the fit expression of my sorrow, my sorrow at such madness! Now, now it is that “my face should be swollen with weeping,”† and that with Jeremias, “my eyes should shed tears, and my eyelids run down with waters.”‡ What impression does this convey to your minds, my hearers? Have you ever seriously paused to consider what is the tremendous import of those words—for ever blessed, or for ever tormented? What is meant by an Eternity of peace or an Eternity of pain? What is meant by a Paradise, where one rejoices everlastingly, or a Hell, where one groans everlastingly? Speak, speak, my brethren; have you ever in good earnest applied your minds to this inquiry? If you have not, go, I say with Isaias, go quickly, and close fast your chamber door: “Go, my people, enter into thy chambers, shut thy doors upon thee,”§ no longer talk of other men’s doings, but *about thee*; and there, with windows closed and lights extinguished, meditate a little while upon these things, and then

* Wisd. xvi. 14.

† Job xvi. 17.

‡ Jer. ix. 18.

§ Isa. xxvi. 20.

come back to me ; I am sure that you will come back as those did who returned from the cave of the celebrated magician Trophonius, stupefied, absorbed, and unable ever to smile again. But even on the consideration which you have already given to these matters, can you imagine any more dreadful folly and neglect, than to risk on any account a matter of such immense importance, to feel in no hurry about it, to have no anxiety concerning it ? It is your own exclusive personal weal or woe, that here lies at stake. And if, which God forbid, any of you should sink into the depths of hell, who will be merciful enough, or who will be strong enough, to raise you out of it ? Absalom, when unhappily banished from his country, had one in favor with David to intercede, though it was done with some sinister motive, for his return home.* Joseph, when confined in his gloomy prison, had Pharaoh's butler, who had indeed for a season forgotten him, to recover his liberty for him. Jeremias, cast by wicked men into the muddy bottom of a dungeon, and there left to die of cold, hunger, stench, and filth, had an Abdemelech who in kind pity let him down a cord, by clinging to which he raised himself up. But whom have you got to help you out of "the depth of the belly of hell" ? † Where is the extended cord which shall reach from heaven to the vast profundity below ? Where is the strong arm, mighty to raise you up ? Hear attentively what Job declares, "He that goeth down to hell shall not come up, nor shall he return any more into his house." ‡ Think of this. There is no possibility of your return. Have you well considered it ? I would say to you then in much sadness with Ecclesiasticus, "My son, keep thy soul, and give it honor, according to its desert." § If I

* 2 Kings xiv.

† Eccles. ii. 7.

‡ Job vii. 9. 10.

§ Eccles. x. 28.

had this morning been endeavoring to persuade you to do something for my own interest, as, for example, that you should come in great numbers to hear my sermon, that you should praise me, or give me some substantial token of gratitude for my labors, you might have justly looked on me with some suspicion; but all I have done has not been for myself or for any one else but you; I have only asked you to take some interest in, to have some pity on, yourselves. "Have pity on thy own soul." * And if you will not grant me as much as this, what can I ever hope for from you; to what can I ever induce you? For to apply to you the reproof of Salvian: "Nothing so bad, nothing so inhuman, nothing so impious can be said of you, as this—It is impossible by any means to make you love your own selves." That you do not love your opponents, I can understand you; that you do not love your enemies, I can make some allowance for you; but that you have no love for your own selves, this I cannot tolerate. "Who will justify him" (I speak with the wise man), "that sinneth against his own soul?" † Oh, if you are so backward to learn from other sources its paramount value, at least consider how the devil carefully watches for every favorable opportunity of stealing it from you, as I told you at first; how artfully in various ways he attempts to deceive you, to coax you, to seduce you, and to obtain the entire dominion over you. He it is, who leads you to prefer every other consideration to this one, which you ought in reason to prefer to every other. Wherefore only tell me (I speak again in the words of the same great Prelate), "What madness is it for you to despise these souls, which the devil values so highly?" Were he the Lord of the Universe, be assured, he would be most

* *Eccius. xxx. 24.*† *Eccius x. 32.*

glad to give you all he has, in exchange for your soul. "All these things will I give thee, if, falling down, thou wilt adore me."* And will you gladly let him have your souls for a price so contemptible? Will you barter them for a fleeting pleasure? for a fading beauty? for some paltry advantage of this world? For the sake of a mere nothing will you basely cast yourselves into the jaws of this devouring monster? Never let it be said of you, my hearers, that you ever so fatally wronged your soul: never put it to shame and disgrace by such conduct; but begin this very day to commune with your own hearts, to form a proper estimate of your own real worth, and, as Moses said in Deuteronomy, to "keep your souls carefully."†

THE SECOND PART.

7. I have no wish to deny that men's grievous neglect of their salvation might admit of some excuse, were salvation after all, an easy matter. But is it so, my hearers? Is it so, I ask? Sad for you, should you think this: rather, woe unto you, if in a business of such importance you embrace so grave an error! Very far from its being, as you suppose, an easy matter, it is one, attended with so great risk and uncertainty, that the most eminent saints with all the pains they have bestowed upon it have lived in fear because of it; they have been horror-struck at the prospect of the appalling judgment of that Lord, who, somehow or other, is formidable even to those who always compass Him about in the form of an encircling crown: "God is great and terrible in the sight of all them that are round about Him.‡

Poor disconsolate Jerome! What did he leave undone, if

* St. Matt. iv. 9.

† Deut. iv. 15.

‡ Ps. lxxxviii. 8.

by any means he might procure some faint assurance to his soul in this great business? In what tangled forests, in what gloomy caves, did he go and bury himself! What a sharp conflict he maintained, even to his old age, against the lusts of his flesh! And yet, in what terms did he describe his state? "Defiled with the pollutions of sin, I toil night and day in fear of having to pay the uttermost farthing." A holy Gregory, a holy Bernard—in what groans and bitter sighs did they not give vent to their feelings! And a holy Augustine—how he shook within him, when he said, "I dread the everlasting fire! I dread the everlasting fire!" All the love, which glowed so warmly in his heart toward God, was still unable to deliver him from this fear. But come, come with me, to that frightful grotto of hermits, which, on account of the bitter pains, endured by all its inmates, obtained the name of "the penitent's prison," when it might have been more truly entitled "the convert's Hell." There, what was left undone to appease the indignation of God? Some remained all night erect praying to heaven, some on their knees, some profoundly inclined; but most, with their hands tied behind their backs, like criminals, kept their eyes constantly on the ground, as being unworthy to look up to heaven. Others sat upon the earth, covered with ashes; and, keeping their faces hid on their knees, they "made mourning as for an only son."* That is, they mourned over their souls as they would have over the body of a most dear friend. Some struck their breasts, some tore their hair; others seemed to find their only comfort in looking at the putrefaction of their flesh which their austerities had produced. Who spoke there of joy, of jesting, of pleasantries? Mercy, clemency, compassion, pardon; these were the only words which were heard in these cav-

* Jer. vi. 26.

erns; if indeed any words could be heard amid the sobs and groans which overpowered all other sounds. Here fasts were long and rigorous, and sleep was short; they took absolutely no care for their bodies. You might have seen some gasping with intense thirst, their tongues hanging out like those of dogs, dry and parched. Some exposed themselves unprotected to the midnight cold of winter, others plunged into ice and snow; and those who had not sufficient courage for such things begged the Superior that he would keep them loaded with heavy chains, not merely for one day, but for their whole lives, till they should be taken out to burial. But why do I speak of burial? for there were many who entreated that not even this mercy should be shown them; but that their bodies, even while yet warm, should be thrown out for the crows or the dogs; and their desires were often granted, and for their complete dishonor, not even a single psalm or prayer was read over their corpses.

8. Now considering the great holiness in which these people passed their days, who would not suppose that they were assured of their salvation? or, at least, that they came in course of time to regard it, as more probable than otherwise; so that their hope would exceed their apprehensions? And yet, listen to an account of them, which, whenever it recurs to my thoughts, fills me with the deepest horror. So far were these wretched beings from obtaining anything, like assurance, that, on the contrary, when any of their number lay dying on his bed of ashes, his beloved place of repose, the brethren all vied with each other in crowding around him in the saddest mood; and then with a trembling voice they asked him: "How is it with you, dear brother? how do you feel? what have you to tell us? what is now your hope? or what do you expect? Have you at last obtained what you sought for with so many tears? Or, are you still kept

in a state of fear? What is now before you? a kingdom, or slavery? a sceptre, or a chain? Do you seem to hear a sweet sound whispering within you, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee?'* Or, on the other hand, is it a terrific voice, that you hear, crying aloud, 'Having bound his hands and feet, cast him into outer darkness'?† What! Oh, what, dear brother, can you say? Oh! we entreat thee, tell us the true state of your soul; so that by knowing your condition we may be enabled to form some conjecture what will be our own!" What answer, suppose ye, did the dying men give to such most doleful inquiries? It is true, that some of them, calmly raising their eyes to heaven, blessed God and said: "Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us to be a prey to their teeth!"‡ But alas! how many of them answered differently—that they were still in suspense. "Perhaps my soul will have to pass through a water insupportable";§ as if they should say, "We hope, we hope to pass it; but the torrent is swollen; but the water is troubled, and all the way over, even to the opposite side, there is imminent risk of being drowned." There were, moreover, which is more remarkable, there were many of their number, who, heaving a deep groan of anguish, uttered "Alas! alas!"—and said no more. These, when urged to express themselves more clearly, subjoined, "Woe to the soul, that has not perfectly and inviolably kept all the laws of its profession! Woe, woe to that miserable soul; because the time is now come for it to know what its portion must be in another world." I am well aware, my dear sirs, that a narrative, such as this, must to many persons savor of the fabulous; and we may well ascribe it to the wish of men that it were so: but there is no need of our flattering ourselves. The narrative is all too true. The facts are related

* St. Luke v. 20.

† St. Matt. xxii. 1-

‡ Ps. cxlii. 6.

§ Ps. cxlii. 5.

to us by St. John Climacus, that most renowned Abbot of the monastery of Mount Sinai, who was present on the spot, who heard and saw what happened with his own ears and with his own eyes.

9. But, if this be true, from whence comes it, that *we* should be the only people to regard salvation as something so easy and so certain, demanding of us no sort of anxiety, even as if we had it already in our hands? "From whom," I will sorrowfully ask with St. Bernard, "from whom have we learnt thus to disguise the truth from ourselves? Whence this so fatal lukewarmness? Whence this so accursed self-security?" I can assign it to no other cause than an utter want of all reflection, such as blinds our eyes, and does not allow us, as the wise man says, to observe the precipices before our feet. "The way of the wicked is darksome; they know not where they fall."* Well, then, you ask me, what shall we do? Do you ask me? You might go to a better guide; but if you wish my counsel, I can give no better than what I have taken for myself. If you will take my advice, turn your backs upon the world; and if you have still time to flee from it as Lot did from Sodom, do not delay, for even the innocent cannot long live safely among sinners. But if either the courage or the liberty for such a step is not yours, why do you not at least resolve upon weekly confession and communion; why do you not lay aside this pride, this ambition, this revolting sensuality? if you refuse to do this, what more can I say? Can I say that you have any real care for your salvation? No, but that you have none; and this I tell you so plainly, that I cannot fear that you mistake my meaning. I may rather fear that you do not care even to hear me. But what can I do? If you will not hear me, I can only turn

* Prov. iv. 19.

to these images, to these sculptures, to the very stones of the church, to bear witness before God that I have not failed to speak to you as my duty required. I have, however, no need of such witnesses. That living and true Judge is here in person, who must one day judge my cause and yours; and He hears every word which I say.

Thou knowest, my God, how ardently I desire the welfare of this people, this illustrious people, called by Thy Name. How happy should I be, could I give my very life and blood for their sakes, as Thou hast given Thine for me! But since this cannot be, I promise Thee that I will at least not fail to tell them the Truth. Only do Thou grant, that they may receive it with the same ready good-will, as that, with which it is now spoken. I will preach to their ears: do Thou in the mean time speak to the heart. I will inform their understandings: do Thou in the mean time inflame their wills. It is Thine with the gentle force of Thy love to draw unto Thyself the wandering sinner. What more can I do, than hold forth the light, the beacon to the benighted mariner? It remains with Thee to breathe forth that holy propitious gale, which shall waft him to the desired **haven safe and sound.**

SERMON III.

ON AVOIDING THE OCCASIONS OF SIN.

"When a strong man armed keepeth his court, those things which he possesseth are in peace."—ST. LUKE xi. 21.

I. I HAVE always admired the exquisite sagacity, shown on a certain occasion by Trochilus, a favorite disciple of Plato. By almost a miracle he had escaped from a desperate storm at sea, in which the ship was dashed to pieces, and he himself all but drowned. Reaching his home in a miserable plight, what, think you, was the first thing he did? He immediately ordered that two windows in a saloon charmingly situated, so as to front the sea, should be walled up; for fear, he said, lest, some fine day, looking on the sea, when calm and tranquil, he should be again tempted to venture on its waters.

Now, at this most Holy season of Lent, it will not be at all surprising to find numbers among you, who, under a powerful impression of the stirring appeals they have heard or the encouraging examples they have witnessed, are making good their escape, hand in hand together, from the deadly shipwreck of sin. But do you therefore believe, that for this mere reason I could depend—entirely depend—on you? Certainly not. I should rather fear, lest, coming to look at your sin under an altered aspect, you should be incautiously led to behave like those persons, who, though just saved from the ravenous deep, are seen engaged on the shore in collecting the scattered fragments of the vessel, with the de-

sign, after repairing them, of once more venturing their lives on the very element, whose treachery they had only just now experienced. I come, therefore, to exhort you to wall up all your windows that front the sea. Without a metaphor, I come to exhort you to keep aloof from all those occasions which may easily entice you back to your former sins; because, so long as one such occasion only be left, it is enough to make you miscarry, to betray you into fresh offences and danger.

I am aware that this may appear to some a very rigorous demand, a requiring of you too much; that you must henceforth make up your minds to deny yourselves a single look. But the Gospel affirms quite the contrary, if we will only believe it. It teaches us that there is no other method to live in peace and safety, than by keeping those avenues blocked up and approaches guarded, by which external objects may approach to tempt us. "When a strong man armed keepeth his court, those things which he possesseth are in peace." Have you noticed the expression? He does not say, the inner apartment, the centre of the house; he says, the "court," his outer court: for, let but temptation effect the smallest entrance, and who can then resist it? Do you then desire, at this season of Lent, to be truly, permanently, and savingly converted to God? There is no other way before you. You must not only renounce sin, but everything that tends to solicit you to it. Unless this be done, your conversion, instead of its being genuine, will be found a counterfeit. And why? Because serious attention to the proofs, which I shall adduce, will most clearly convince you, that there is no greater folly nor presumption in the world, than for you to expect to preserve your innocence, while you are laying yourselves open to the occasions of sin.

2. All pleasurable objects have this peculiarity about them. While they are immediately in sight, we find it very hard to judge aright, whether we ought to choose, or to reject them: for their presence, as with some magical charm, captivates our senses, bewitches our understandings, and enslaves our affections. Aristotle in his famous *Ethics* expressly states this. He instances it in the conduct of the Trojan senators, who, when they consulted about Helen, wisely decided, during her absence, that she ought to be banished from the city, thereby to save themselves from the wrath of the gods and of men; but when they beheld her near, in the midst of them, dazzling their eyes with the loveliness of her person and the charming elegance of her manners, they changed their opinion and resolved to retain her still within the walls, in spite of confederate Greece and all its fury. And who among us does not find this to be continually verified in his own experience? How far more difficult it is for a hungry man to abstain from eating, when there is before him a plentiful board; or, a feverish man to deny himself drink, when he sees the full cup at his side? Let the gaming-table be removed out of the gambler's sight, and he can easily resolve to have nothing more to do with the dice, which have done him such cruel mischief: he hates them, he abhors them, he execrates them; but, let him only chance to see them in the hands of his boon companion, and what can prevent his immediately resuming those bad habits, he only a moment ago condemned? In the same way, in the presence of an enemy, it is found a more difficult thing to repress anger; in the presence of money, to decline a fraud; in the presence of a flatterer, to mortify pride; in the presence of a fair tempter, to restrain lust. And, to be quite convinced of this, don't you remember what the last resource of the devil was, when he assaulted our Lord in the desert?

He offered to make Him the Ruler of the universe, would He only consent to be the worshipper of hell. But what did the evil one do first? He first conducted Christ to the summit of an "exceeding high mountain," and from thence he minutely pointed out to Him every country and every kingdom of the earth. This being done, he proceeded to his insolent proposal. Now why all this ado? Could he not have negotiated the same treaty with Christ under the tangled horrors of a forest, or amid the obscure depths of a cavern? Even in these places, expert, as he was, in geography, he could, without calling in the help of a map, have easily said, "The world is now divided into three parts, called Europe, Africa, and Asia. Asia, which is the largest, contains such and such provinces: such and such provinces belong to Africa, which is the most wonderful: such and such belong to Europe, which is the most beautiful. In these provinces there are such and such magnificent cities; and these charming districts, these well-stocked rivers, these noble seas, severally belong to each: and, beyond them, there lies another world, almost as big as this; in which are to be found gold mines inexhaustible, a population beyond number, and productions of nature the most extraordinary. It is true, that this additional world is yet but imperfectly discovered: but I am willing to throw it you, *extra*,* into the bargain, provided only that you now bend your knees and do me homage; "All these things will I give thee, if, falling down, thou wilt adore me."* Now, why was not the devil satisfied with only uttering words to this effect? Why must he needs have all, that he had promised, actually paraded before Christ, that He might see it? "He showed Him all the kingdoms of the world." And, in order to this, why

* St. Matt. iv. 9.

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was he at the pains of conveying Him through the air to the summit of a mountain, which was so inaccessible, that, if we are to believe St. Chrysostom, it soared far above all the loftiest eminences in the world? Why? but because this subtle fiend perfectly well knew the power, which an object present to the eye exercises over our minds, and that, when the senses are thus captured first, the will is soon brought to surrender.

But this, my brethren, is the very state you are in, so long as you are living with the occasions of sin close about you. The fascinating object is ever in your sight, and, so to speak, within your grasp. You hear its invitations, you gaze on its charms, you feel its flatteries. Under such circumstances, I ask, can you find it an easy matter to resist, to hate, to reject it? "This," exclaims St. Jerome, moved with righteous indignation against you—"this is presumption. For the senses fix upon that, which they see, hear, smell, taste, handle; and what holds out to them the prospect of gratification, that they pursue." Such being the fact, who will be surety for it, that you may gaze at the theatre on those profane exhibitions, so full of pleasure, and yet not be pleased with them? that you may read in romances those amorous tales, so full of delight, and yet not be delighted with them? that you may sit listening at a concert to those charming warblers, and yet not be charmed with them? Pray, have the kindness to tell me, who is your guarantee for this? Because on this the solution of our question must depend; whether yours be a reasonable hope, or rather a rash presumption.

3. Now, since this principle is one of universal application, you must assert a claim to some special prerogative, on which to ground your hopes, as ever you would exempt them from the charge of presumption. Tell me therefore,

upon what is your reliance placed, when you so coolly thrust yourself into the high-road of temptation? I think I know it, without your telling me. Unless I mistake, you are relying either upon your own virtue, or upon the grace of God. The first makes you feel strong; the last gives you a feeling of security. Perhaps your idea is, that you have so completely brought your lower appetites under restraint, that they will not rebel against you: it is this, that makes you feel strong. Or, you suppose yourself to be so singularly protected by God, that He will never forsake you: and it is this, that gives you a feeling of security. Is it so? I confess myself unable to discover any other more probable reasons for the confidence you express in this matter. Let us then inquire, whether either of the two be so well-grounded, as to justify the sanguine opinion you now entertain of your state, and so to release you from all necessity of "keeping your court."

First, as to the restraint, under which you have brought your lower appetites, just inform me; to what extent have you succeeded in this? Have you eclipsed those holy men, who passed nearly their whole lives in prayers, in tears, in mortification, in self-denial? I, for one, refuse to give you credit for this. However, suppose we grant it you; yet I observe, in the case of these holy men, that they trembled at the approach of any sinful temptation, and frankly confessed that they could only promise themselves victory by fighting, like so many Parthians; that is, not so much by facing the enemy, as by retreating before him. What St. Jerome avowed in his reply to Vigilantius may well speak for them all. When asked, what made him so timid, and why, having it in his power to live, like a civilized being, in the city, he preferred deserting his home, and, like a wild beast, settling himself down in the wilderness, the saint answered, "Knowest thou what causes me to fear? I fear to

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see thee. I feart to hear thee. I fear, lest I should be not able to resist thy importunity. If this should seem to thee only a trifling excuse, why then, I fear the various occasions of sinning, in the midst of which thy life is spent. I fear the angry collisions. I fear the idle gossip. I fear the grasping avarice. I fear the swelling pride. I fear the lascivious glances." Then under the idea of his not having yet sufficiently explained himself, he felt no shame in using these very expressions, which had he not really used them, I would never mention—"I fear to meet the fair courtesans, and lest their deluding charms and voluptuous eyes should entice me to deeds of wickedness." Hereupon Vigilantius insisted, that to act in this way was not so much a glorious victory, as a cowardly flight, and a base desertion. "Have patience with me," Jerome rejoined; "I must acknowledge how weak I am; I cannot sum up courage to venture in thy company against such powerful adversaries; for, although I might possibly come off victorious, yet my fears would rather lead me to anticipate a defeat. And therefore I confess my weakness. I refuse to fight in the hope of conquering, lest I should be conquered myself"—it being a wiser course in our spiritual conflicts to flee, so as to prevent a discomfiture, than, for not having fled, to be routed and overcome. St. Jerome, you see, could place but little trust in himself on these occasions; and, after all, they threatened him with no immediate, but only with a remote danger; as, for instance, his chancing to come in the way of some light woman. How then can you ever promise yourself such entire security, when the danger besetting you is not a remote one, but nigh at hand; as, for instance (not to drop our former illustration), your gazing on the countenance of some fair one, your addressing her, your listening to her, and your allowing yourself freely and familiarly to

converse with her? What! Do you not fear her smiles, when St. Jerome feared only her look? Can you venture to pay a visit, when he could not trust himself to a chance meeting? Does your bosom then bear more livid traces of the marks of the stone's repeated blow, than were ever stamped on St. Jerome's? By your leave, just let me see. Where are the cheeks, more wrinkled through fasting? Where are the knees, more hardened through praying? Where are the arms, more wearied with scourging? Where are the eyes, more swollen with floods of tears? Do the midnight vigils, which you have regularly observed, either in meditating upon the Scriptures or in writing comments upon them, surpass the vigils kept by St. Jerome? At what distance have you left him behind you in the frequency and rigor of your various acts of penance and self-discipline? And would you now make me believe that your flesh is more subdued to the Spirit, than was the case with so great a saint as he was? I don't believe you: excuse me, but I don't believe you, try hard, as you can, to convince me. And therefore you too must be content, however strong you feel, to betake yourself with St. Jerome to a speedy flight from the occasions of sin.

Ezechiel declares, "Such of them as shall flee shall escape, and they shall be in the mountains, like doves of the valleys, all of them trembling."* Doves, when they have reached on the wing some mountain top, are less timid, than when they walked in the valleys below; but with godly persons, it is not so. They have as much reason to fear, when they are, so to say, on the top of perfection, as they had, when they were on the lower ground beneath. "They shall be in the mountains, like doves of the valleys, all of them trem-

* Ezech. vii. 16.

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bling." For when we affirm that "perfect charity casteth out fear," we do not mean that it casts out the fear of the fault of sin, but the fear of the punishment of sin, which no longer causes uneasiness—"fear of the punishment, not fear of the fault" (St. Th. Aquinas). So far is love from casting out the fear of the fault, that it rather increases it. The more a man loves God, the greater care and pains he will take not to lose Him. Be this, however, as it may; that you may not regard the above fears, as the needless qualms of an overrighteous Jerome, let me tell you that I could produce a long list of men quite blameless in their general lives, who, when exposed to similar temptations, not only modestly and frankly confessed their weakness, but by their shameful relapses into sin actually attested it. And who would not feel his flesh creep through fear, when he remembers that a most famous anchorite named James, upon whose forehead and locks the wrinkles and the snows of age had settled, after a life spent among the horrors of a most frightful desert solitude, was not wise enough to keep himself from the sight of a tempting occasion of sin; but in one moment, throwing away most lamentably the merits acquired during fifty years of the most terrible penance, passed from consent to fornication; from fornication to murder; whence he would have fallen into the pit of despair, and final impenitence, had not the merciful hand of God been more careful to raise him than he was to rise? A hermit named Victorinus, of whom St. Gregory tells us, had a similar fall; it was the same with Theophilus, the same with Ptolemy, the same with Macarius of Rome; the same was the case with many other most holy recluses, mentioned by Palladius, whose relapse makes it only too clear to us that though the common axiom "*nemo repente fit optimus*" is certainly true, for it takes a great effort to

rise to the heights of sanctity, its opposite "*nemo repente fit pessimus*" can by no means be admitted; for no effort is required to throw ourselves into an abyss which is yawning before us. We learn from such sad examples that the fears St. Jerome had of himself were no foolish scruples, but well founded in truth. And therefore how can you pretend to be the only persons free from such fears—you too, men clothed in fine linen; *you*, scented with perfumes; *you*, nursed on the lap of ease; *you*, pampered with dainties—how can you promise yourselves, in the midst of a world of temptation, such a strength, as men, who wore out their lives for Christ's sake in the caves of the earth, never once presumed to arrogate to themselves? Oh, what silly boasting! Oh, what presumption is this! I answer you with the proverb of the wise man; "He that trusteth in his riches shall fall."*

4. Now, if these men, with all those attainments in holiness, which had made them really strong, had not the smallest expectation of receiving that superabundant grace from God, which would render them secure, what shall we say of you (to come to the second ground of your confidence), who are still fondly expecting it? Never does God refuse to any man a sufficient protection. Still, you must remember that, an end being attainable by a more ordinary means, He is not wont to employ one, that is extraordinary. This is held to be a general rule, not less applying to the dispensations of Grace, than to those of nature. And you will find that the Almighty for this reason never performs a miracle, when the object, for which you would fain see one, can be effected without. "At the point, where human weakness fails, Divine power meets us with help:" 'tis thus the

* Prov. xi. 28.

great Commentator Tostatus thus wisely states the doctrine : "and therefore miracles are only performed, when human resources are proved to be inadequate." Would you have an example of this, out of the vast numbers one might adduce from Holy Scripture, consider the case of the Magi. When they had to set out on their journey to Christ, they had a star for their guide ; when they had to return to their own homes, they had none. The fact is admitted. And yet, as on their return home they had to strike out a new road, one perhaps more fatiguing, more intricate, and more unknown, it would seem they needed some such guidance. How then was it ? Why, in their journey to Christ, they must reach a spot, which it was quite out of the power of any human being to indicate to them ; it being the most holy grotto of Bethlehem, a place at that time as unknown in the world, as it was renowned in heaven : and therefore they were supplied with that celestial luminary to conduct them thither. But the case was different on their return to their own country : for then, as they were perfectly well acquainted with their destination, if ignorant of the way, they could easily have discovered it by employing guides, or asking men on the road, or sending people on to explore. On the same principle, the Angel struck off in the prison the chains of Peter and his fetters : but he did not help him to put on his clothes ; because Peter could very well do this for himself. On the same principle, the Angel saved in the storm the ship of Paul and his fellow-passengers : but he did not help him to land ; because Paul could very well do this for himself. And just as Christ was able to raise Lazarus alive from his grave, though his body lay in a state of putrefaction, so unquestionably He could with the greatest ease have made the sepulchral stone leap up into the air : but notwithstanding this, He would

have this stone removed by the standers-by—"Take away the stone"—*—because a task, such as this, by no means exceeded their strength. From all these interesting cases you may infer, that we ought never to expect any extraordinary assistance from God, when an ordinary one would be sufficient for the end we have in view.

To return then to our main point, it must be perfectly clear that by avoiding that occasion of sin, into which with open eyes you thrust yourself, you might easily preserve your innocence by means of the ordinary assistance alone, which God's providence affords you. "He who is aware of the snares shall be secure."† So far you have the promise of God's support; nor can it fail you. "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Beyond this, how can you dare promise yourself some special protection, and then in this confidence go, and mix in scenes of temptation and danger, as if you would constrain Him to work a miracle in your defence? If this be not presumption, pray, what is? Does a comedy excite in you impure thoughts, and do you still allow yourself to listen to it? Does a game of chance provoke your angry feelings, and do you still sit to play it out? Does a conversation kindle your libidinous flames, and do you consent to renew it? And do you expect that God will preserve you unharmed in the midst of the fire, when it was far more easy for you never to have approached it, and so never to have experienced its heat? Never, never will He thus preserve you. I am quite aware that He once preserved from harm the three young men in the Babylonian furnace, so that "the fire had no power on their bodies, neither was an hair of their heads singed;"‡ that He preserved the infant Moses from being drowned in the

* St. John xi. 29.

† Prov. xi. 25.

‡ Dan. iii. 94.

waters of the Nile; that He preserved Daniel from being devoured by the hungry lions; and, which was a still greater deliverance, that He preserved the whole family of Noe, confined within a cage of bears, wolves, panthers, wild boars, tigers, and leopards, without its sustaining the least injury. But none of these persons, you will please to observe, had **cast** themselves, of their own caprice, into the teeth of such dangers. And therefore gather from all such examples this weighty lesson—he, who exposes himself wilfully in the path of temptation, must never presume on his receiving any special assistance from God. Who then, you ask, may? why, he who exposes himself on the demand of duty, in the path of obedience, on the call of charity. “He hath given His Angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways.” * Have you rightly understood this text? In what places wilt thou be protected? In what places wilt thou be kept from falling? When thou art dashing over precipices? By no means: in the *ways*; yea, in those ways only, into which thy duty has conducted thee—in *thy* ways. The man, who needlessly risks his life among the clefted rocks and the deep yawning chasms, Oh, how soon must he perish! God Himself, speaking to Job, tells us as much, “Behold his hope shall fail him, and in the sight of all he shall be cast down.” †

A most remarkable difference, which I have had occasion to notice, between Judith, the glory of the renowned Bethulia, and Dina, the daughter of the patriarch Jacob, seems here to come in aid of my argument. I need not tell you how Judith, when designing the overthrow of the proud Holofernes, boldly penetrated into the camp of the Assyrians, and tarried many days there in the midst of a crowd-

* Ps. 90. 11.

† Job 21. 28.

ed throng of rude lawless men. She was observed now speaking to the spies, now arguing with the sentinels, now making overtures to the courtiers, now talking to the Commander himself. And all this time she was decked out with every advantage and attraction of dress, every gay and sparkling ornament, diffusing fragrance wherever she went. in all the fascination of her beauty. How vastly inferior to her, in these respects, was Dina! In the company of her pilgrim brethren she had reached a certain town, called Salem, nigh unto which they halted and pitched their tents on a piece of ground they had purchased for that purpose. The poor damsel, quite at a loss how to beguile the live-long day, pent up as she was within her tent, had the curiosity to venture a little out of bounds, just "to see the women of that country,"* perhaps to observe—a thing quite natural—how they dressed, what finery they wore. But what followed? Scarcely had this innocent dove quitted its nest, than it fell into the claws of a voracious bird of prey; for such the prince of that country proved himself to be: and so it came to pass, that, whereas Judith with her chastity unblemished returned to her home, Dina went back to her tent with the loss of her virgin honor. How was it possible now for one of these women, being so far less exposed, to incur such an irreparable disgrace; while the other, who was so much more exposed, enjoyed such a perfect security? Judith penetrated into the very camp of the soldiers; Dina scarce got beyond the limits of her tent. Judith went to hold a conference with men; Dina went "to see the women of that country." Judith studied to be admired; Dina scarcely expected to be seen. Judith decked herself out with idolatrous finery; Dina did not even change

* Gen. xxiv. 1.

her ordinary dress. Judith prolonged her visit ; Dina merely indulged in a passing trip. And yet, notwithstanding all this, Dina lamentably fell, while Judith stood triumphantly firm. And what caused all this difference ? Simply because the latter faced so great a danger on a Divine impulse, as we are expressly informed—"not from sensuality, but from virtue,"* whereas the other exposed herself by an act of her own will, and from a feminine curiosity, that she might "see the women of that country." Produce me, if you can, any sounder reason for the difference of the results in the two cases. This, beyond all doubt, is God's way of dealing with us, to vouchsafe a far more abundant measure of His protection to a person, who finds himself involved in such dangers from necessity, than to another, who has challenged them out of his own caprice. Did He not preserve Sara untouched, when in the power of Pharaoh, who had carried her off?† Did He not preserve Rebecca safe, when in the house of Abimelech, who had fallen in love with her?‡ Did He not preserve Joseph unmoved amid the charms of his mistress, who enticed him ? Did He not preserve Susanna undefiled amid the assaults of the elders, who ensnared her ? He certainly did : He thus preserved them all. But then they all ran these risks in obedience to a Divine command, as was the case with Sara and Rebecca ; or, at least, they did not voluntarily incur them, as was the case with Joseph and Susanna. On the other hand, David, by no means a less holy person, than any of these, because he once ventured for his own gratification to gaze from his window on the beauty of Bethsabee, was immediately abandoned by God, and left, not so much to fall, as to plunge headlong, into the abyss, first of flagrant adultery, and then

* Judith x. 4.

† Gen. xli.

‡ Gen. xxvi.

§ Gen. xxxix.

of infamous homicide. On the strength of these examples you may conclude, should it ever be your lot to find yourselves, either from necessity or against your own will, exposed to any like danger of sinning, that God, in answer to your supplications, will not refuse so to protect you, that the deadly poison may do you no mischief: whereas, if you put yourselves forward to sport on the brink of temptation, you have sad cause to fear and tremble for the consequences; because to expect from God, under such circumstances, any special protection to save you from the fatal infection, would amount to sheer presumption.

“Who will pity an enchanter struck by a serpent?”* What did the Preacher intend by asking this question? I will tell you. Should some poor gardener, shepherd, or way-faring man chance to be bitten by a serpent, lurking insidiously under the green herb, every one pities him; all are quickly on the move to do something to relieve him: but, should the person bitten be some charmer who, down yonder in the public streets, takes the serpent into his hand, fondles it, puts it into his mouth, licks and kisses it, why, then, every stander-by will rather say, “Ah, it served him quite right!” The serpent here represents the occasion: do not, however, expect to receive the same amount of pity, whether it be the serpent who first attacks you, or whether you are the first to provoke the serpent. And yet, after all I can urge, still you refuse to believe it. For, only let the priest positively refuse to give you absolution unless you first make a resolution to avoid the next occasion of repeating those sins—you will instantly accuse him of being overstrict, unfeeling, unreasonable; so strong is the impression you have on your mind, that he ought to trust you. But how can he

* *Eccles.* xii. 79.

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possibly trust you, convinced, as he is, that, while you are in this state of mind, God will by no means protect you? Pray attend to this latter point; for it much deserves your consideration.

5. We know, that when the Almighty prohibited any action among His people, He, at the same time, generally prohibited whatever could furnish even the remotest occasion to that action. Thus, at the beginning, in the earthly Paradise, when He forbade our first parents' eating of the tree of knowledge, He forbade them to "touch it."* Nor did He proceed otherwise with the Israelites: for if He forbade their worshipping any kind of image, He also forbade their having an image in their possession. And, if He forbade their using leavened bread at the Passover, He forbade likewise their keeping any: † and, if He forbade their ascending the sides of Mount Sinai, He forbade them to approach its borders: ‡ and, if He forbade their dressing food on the Sabbath-day, He forbade them equally to kindle a fire: and, just in the same way, if He forbade the Nazarites drinking wine, He forbade them alike even to taste the grape, whether fresh or dried; § lest, their senses being taken with the sweetness of the fruit, they should long for the luscious liquor. In the New Testament, He has been at still greater pains to enforce the same rule. Inquire, concerning this, of St. John Chrysostom; and he will tell you, that Christ in His Evangelical Law has scarcely done anything else, than provide for the cutting off all those occasions, whereby men come so easily to transgress the injunctions of the old Commandments. Let us instance some remarkable proofs of this. Under the old Law, murder was prohibited; "Thou shalt not kill" || but to what use? This law was little observ-

* Gen. iii. 3. † Ex. xii. 19. ‡ Ex. xix. § Num. vi. || Ex. xx.

ed; because people, being in the habit of provoking their neighbors by irritating language, could then hardly restrain themselves from proceeding from words to blows, and from blows to bloodshed. What then did Christ do? He made a hedge around this Commandment, and He spake thus—"Ye have heard that it was said to them of old, Thou shalt not kill; but I say to you, that whosoever . . . shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be guilty of the council."* See, how, to prevent bloodshed, He cut off the occasion, furnished by irritating language. Again, under the old Law, perjury was prohibited; "Ye shall not swear falsely by My Name."† But to what use? This also was easily disobeyed; because people, commonly expressing themselves in exaggerated language, easily passed on then from exaggerations to oaths, and from oaths to perjury. What then did Christ do? He made another hedge around this other Commandment, and He spake thus—"Ye have heard that it was said to them of old, Thou shalt not forswear thyself; . . . but I say to you not to swear at all; . . . but let your speech be yea, yea: no, no." See, how, to prevent perjury, He cuts off the occasion, furnished by needless exaggerations. Once more: under the old Law, adultery was forbidden; "Thou shalt not commit adultery": but to what use? Neither was this faithfully observed; because people, allowing themselves the liberty to feast their eyes on female beauty, found it difficult then to restrain themselves, so as not to advance from looks to desires, and from desires to their consequences. What then did Christ do? For this Commandment also He provided another hedge to secure it, and He spake thus—"Ye have heard that it was said to them of old, Thou shalt not commit adultery;

* St. Matt. v. 21, 22.

† Lev. xix. 12.

but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath already committed adultery with her in his heart." See, how, to prevent adultery, He cuts off the occasion, furnished by unrestrained looks. Hence, from these and other like regulations it would appear, that Christ came among us almost with no other design, than to defend us from everything tending to expose us to any imminent danger of overstepping and breaking the Law; the very design, which the great prophet Isaias seems to have contemplated, when he shrewdly foretold, that Christ, to His special honor, would be called "The repairer of the fences."*

What are we now to infer from all this? Precisely what I ventured to assert; namely, that, on occasions like these, God will decline granting us any extraordinary protection. For, tell me, why should He so expressly and so anxiously bid us keep aloof, to the utmost of our power, from all such occasions, had He minded to protect us under them with that extraordinary, that special, that superabundant help, upon which you are reckoning? On this supposition, it was quite superfluous in Him to keep us so far off from the precipice; since He might have allowed us to approach its very edge, and then have suddenly stepped forward to prevent our falling over. He might have left us at full liberty to feast our eyes, as we liked; to exaggerate without any bridle on our tongues, and to call people names to our heart's content; and then have interposed, so as to prevent our committing adultery, perjury, and murder. But, since He has ordered the matter quite otherwise, tell me, Christians, what does this prove? Does it not unquestionably prove, that we ought never on any expectation of His grace to run the risk of doing what is wrong? This inference surely is

* Is. lviii. 12.

plain, obvious, incontrovertible. And, since it is so, how are you acting? Upon what are you relying? When will you be convinced, that, unless you are careful to *keep the outer court*, you must certainly perish? What further would you have, in proof of this?

You cannot now but see how utterly impossible it is for you to build your hopes, with any degree of satisfaction, either on your own virtue, as rendering you strong, or, on the Divine grace and protection, as rendering you secure. The fears, which others have expressed in this matter, should make you tremble, and their miscarriages should put you on your guard. Overrash is the traveller, who must needs go and wade through a swollen wintry stream, after he has seen others before him carried down by its torrent. Overrash is the wayfaring man, who persists in spending the night in a dark lonely forest, after he has heard of others before him, falling there into the hands of assassins. Now therefore shut up those bad books, that afford you so much entertainment, those unprincipled and dangerous publications: Renounce that irreligious society. Abstain for the future from those pernicious games of chance. Curb your strong liking to the many sallies of gallantry, which are carried on, even in our public streets: and, if you at all value your souls, break off resolutely for the future every abandoned and disreputable connection. What use can there be in your saying, "In my case there is now no cause whatever for fear. I am not the man I was. I will be on my guard. I will be true to my principles. Certainly, I shall keep company with the person you allude to; but no harm will come of it." And I say unto you in reply, No: away with her; away with her! God requires of you no less a sacrifice; because whoever renounces idolatry—there is no help for him—he must put away the idol as well,

Unhappy Solomon ! some have despaired of his salvation, since he failed in this duty. What your particular idol is, can be no secret. When you pay your adoration to that fair female countenance, lauded by you to the very skies, as being so angelic and even divine, you have revolted from Christ; you have virtually committed idolatry. What then has your idol to do any longer in your dwelling? Send her away; send her away! Get rid of the occasions of sin: yea, part with everything about you, which may serve to remind you of her—every wicked memento. Only look at these indecent pictures, hung about your room, as if to shame the more serious and sacred subjects, excluded by them. Those emblems of voluptuousness, those immodest sculptured figures,—what is it they represent? So many idolatries! And is it a pleasing reflection to your mind, that, when Christ at your dying hour shall come to summon you, He will find such objects as these in your room, close to your sick-bed? Oh, what a wretched, oh, what a desperate extremity for you to be in! Far be it from me to wish you any such misery: for your eternal salvation would indeed be questionable, were you like Solomon, thus to die, with your idols about you. Do then, as I say; do rather, as God Himself says: for His express Commandment is, “Break their idols in pieces; destroy their names out of those places.”* Cast from your dwellings those representations, which can only forbode death and produce nothing but damnation: scatter them far and wide; or, better still, commit them to the flames; and, as the famous philosopher Crates exclaimed at every handful of his money, while he was casting it into the sea, “I drown you, that you may not drown me! I drown you, that

* Deut. xii. 1.

you may not drown me!" Just so, as you cast those treasures of iniquity into the fire, say in a like heroic spirit; "Away, ye vile traitors. I burn you, that ye burn not me! I burn you, that ye burn not me!" This will demonstrate the truth of what you say. Otherwise—let there be no mistake between us—your conversion is counterfeit. And why? Because that man is convicted of having never honestly purposed to *keep* sin far off from his soul, who can yet open "his outer court" to its admission.

THE SECOND PART.

6. And have I then been laboring all this time to prove how extremely difficult every person must find it to preserve his innocence in the immediate presence of temptation? Ah, what folly in me! I seem to have wasted the whole morning. Why, this perhaps is the most obvious truth, that we commonly hear from the pulpit. Everybody knows it: everybody has some experience of it. But, if so, why does not everybody, at the same time, avoid the occasions of temptation? The reason is: people love to sin. They are, far too many of them, inwardly inflamed with their inordinate lusts. And what is the consequence? They are continually in pursuit of those amusements, which in a manner feed this flame, though it be in secret. Away they go to balls, to evening parties, to visits, to feasts: and, since they cannot gratify their love of pleasure in the grosser form elsewhere, they go where entertainments are carried on under the disguise of recreation. Whenever therefore, my hearers, you see people congregated together for amusement's sake in such places, be they who they may, set them down, without any risk of pronouncing a rash judgment, as sinning. If they do not openly commit sin—which would be saying too much—they sin, at any rate, in their thoughts;

they sin in their looks; they sin in their laughter; they sin in the lusts, which they privily cherish in their hearts. "They are all adulterers, like an oven heated by the baker."* Yes, declares Osee, they are like "an oven," the heat of which does not escape, because it cannot: it is confined; it is imprisoned: but oh, were the obstruction once removed! You would behold the heat flame upwards, rising as many cubits high, as that furnace in Babylon, which burst forth with such destructive rage; "It burnt such of the Chaldeans as it found near."† Is any one taken by surprise at hearing me use this unusual language? Ah, city of ours, such language is nowadays become too necessary. Is it possible for thee to reflect upon the way, in which, by slow and almost imperceptible degrees, thou art become degenerate in thy conversation? Art thou then that city, to which other cities once resorted to learn an example of sobriety, of seriousness, of wisdom, of reserve? And from whence is it, that thou too hast given way to licentiousness? Already, for some years past, both in thy public as well as private reunions, it is recklessly on the advance: and, if left to go on unrestrained, what will come of it? "How is the faithful city that was full of judgment, become a harlot."‡ Ay, this is now that city—once *the faithful city*, and, no less to her praise, the city *full of judgment*—because too free an intercourse between the sexes is found, on experience, to be the first step in the downward course to the sin of fornication.

7. But we very often hear people say, "What great harm is there in a mere carnal frailty? Blasphemies, perjuries, enmities, and robberies—these we can well understand to be most grievous offences: but what great harm is a mere

* Osee vii. 4.

† Dan. iii. 48.

‡ Is. l. 17.

carnal frailty, especially when it hurts nobody else?" What great harm is a mere carnal frailty? Oh, ye angels above our heads, I leave it to you to speak! Do you proclaim the greatness of that harm, of which most people in these days think so lightly. Was it not you, who formerly let loose the cataracts of heaven, that with a deluge they might overwhelm the earth? Wherefore did ye this? Speak. Was it not, because of this very vice, which is now made nothing of? At the time of the deluge, surely other kinds of offences were not wanting. There were robberies, there were contentions, there were perjuries, there were blasphemies: there were all manner of sins, excepting, as St. Thomas observes, the single sin of idolatry. And yet, for what sin, in particular, was the deluge sent? It was for a sin of the flesh. The Scripture affirms this, and holy men attest it; "All flesh had corrupted its way."* If the waters descended in such torrents, it was to sweep away all this stench and filthiness. And still you say, what so great harm is there in a mere carnal frailty? Only try to assemble together in your imagination those innumerable corpses, which you see floating yonder, in so vast an ocean; collect them all into one: and then, shuddering with horror at the enormous pile raised before your eyes, as it almost touches the sky, call the crime, which could draw down such a punishment, call it "a little sin." You attach no importance to this vice, because it is now become so common in the land: and I tell you, that, because it is become so common in the land, you have the very reason to dread it. Never was a chastisement, so frightful, so marvellous in its character, inflicted upon the earth, while fornication was the sin only of a few: when it became universal, then came the deluge.

* Gen vi. 12.

This, in short, is that sin, which beyond every other debases the noble spirit, that is inherent in man: this is that, which, most of all, clouds his imagination: this is that, which, most of all, damages his intellect: this is that, which, while it makes him in his affections like to the brute beasts, entails upon him in a very short time the loss of everything dear to him. This robs him of his time; this robs him of his property; this robs him of his reputation; this robs him of his tranquillity; this robs him of his health; this robs him of his judgment; this robs him of his independence: in a word, this ultimately robs him of his whole self: for it is this, which with a facility, beyond what any other sin possesses, hurries him on to a hopeless grave. Hear what the Preacher declares; "Give not thy soul unto harlots in any point; lest thou destroy thyself:"* he does not say, destroy thy property; but "thyself." Let every one, therefore, be on his guard. For to be allowed to sink into this deep pit of carnality is perhaps the very sorest punishment, which an angry God can bring upon a man; "He whom the Lord is angry with shall fall into it."† Who now is the person among you, that wishes in sincere good earnest to escape this pit? He it is, who does not continually go, as people nowadays commonly do, and sport upon its very brink

* Eccles ix. 6.

† Prov xxii. 24.

SERMON IV.

ON THE INGRATITUDE OF MAN TOWARDS GOD.

"And they rose up, and thrust Him out of the city, and they brought Him to the brow of the hill, whereon their city was built, that they might cast Him down headlong."—ST. LUKE iv. 29.

I. LET the ingratitude of man come forward and take its trial: for I summon it here, my brethren, to appear before you, to answer, to stand on its defence. To-day, for the first time, we come in contact with a kind of people, daring enough—alas! the vile example they give us!—to lay violent hands upon Christ; who assault Him in their fury, arrest Him in their insolence, and drag Him, as their prisoner, to the summit of the precipice, "that they may cast Him down headlong." But softly awhile. Is not this the glorious Messiah, whose coming was so ardently desired, so earnestly implored, and by dint of so much importunity at last obtained? Yes; it is He. And is this the entertainment the world now gives Him? Ah! ye heavens, ye had good reason to keep Him to yourselves with such relentless tenacity! Only, supposing you to have known the treatment in store for Him on the earth, how could you ever consent to surrender Him? Be it however so, as the sin of mankind absolutely demands it. Let the innocent die the death; and, to get rid of Him as quickly as possible, away with Him to the mountain's brow; down with Him from the precipice! But where, in the meanwhile, shall we find the men bold enough to take the lead in this outrage?

Let us just see. Whence shall the monsters come, from what nation, what city, what family—not to say, from what **savage** lair in the cave or forest? Compel me not, I **implore** you, my brethren, to tell you this; for it will make the **hairs** of your head bristle with amazement, and the **blood** of your veins congeal with horror. His own country **Nazareth** is the first to lay hands upon Him to put Him to death!

It is here, then, on this spot, that I would impeach the ingratitude of men this morning, and put it to shame. What! Nazareth, the city indebted to Christ beyond all other cities in Palestine; the city from which He would borrow His surname; the city in which He would fix His abode—Nazareth to be the first in arms against Him; the first to cry Him **down**, to persecute Him with such extreme barbarity! Had an enmity, such as this, been displayed against Him by a set of strangers, under no obligation whatever to Him for any favors, whom He had rather left to be the very refuse of the earth, I could almost find it in my heart to forgive them: but that the Nazarites should betray such enmity! It is too shocking, too outrageous. And yet, woe is me! For, if I am to condemn them, I must needs at the same time condemn many others to. Pardon the freedom, I allow myself, brethren, in speaking to you thus. At the present day we are come to such a pass, that the persons whom Christ has most obliged, usually prove His deadliest enemies. I would speak plainly. The most privileged by their rank, the most eminent for their popularity, the most independent for their riches, the most illustrious for their birth, these are the people, 'tis often found, to insult Him with the most bitter animosity. What, then, have we to do? We must class all such persons with these wicked Nazarites; and then, speaking in general terms, so as to **give** no personal offence, we must proceed to show the excess-

ive ingratitude it betrays to render to a God so merciful evil for good.

2. But I no sooner take upon myself to demonstrate this proposition, than I find cause to repent. For what is the place, my brethren, in which we are assembled? Where is it that we are now speaking? Among wild beasts, or men? Among savages, or Christians? This truly is an argument, which might very properly be debated before an audience of Hyrcanian tigers, or Libyan lions, or dragons of Lerneæ. And, supposing they had any share of reason, I should not despair of convincing them of the enormous ingratitude which men show in rendering evil to a Being who is for ever occupied in doing us good. Methinks, however, that, monsters as they are, they would turn a deaf ear to my severe reproof, and satisfy me by a host of witnesses as to their abhorrence of all such ingratitude, the love they bear to their benefactors, the disinclination they feel to harm them. They would plead in their defence that remarkable testimony of Seneca: "Brute beasts are sensible of kindness; nor is there any animal so intractable as not to be won by gentle treatment and made to love us." They would remind me of the favor shown by Hanno the Carthaginian to lions; a favor so marked as to raise a suspicion among his countrymen, that, since savage beasts were obedient to him, no man would have strength to overcome him. They would tell me the story of the caresses which a Syrian lion bestowed on a certain Mentor of Syracuse, because he had extracted a thorn from its foot; they would refer me to the good services done by another lion in Africa to a certain Elpis of Samos, because he had pulled a bone out of its throat. They would narrate to me how a panther in the wild woods became the companion and even the protector of a man, because he had kindly lifted

her cubs out of a pit. They would call to my recollection the dragon of Arcadia, that rescued its feeder Toantes from the attack of robbers; and the lion of Rome, who defended its benefactor, when a condemned convict, from the jaws of the other wild beasts; and would re-echo in my ears the loud acclamations which expressed the delight of the whole amphitheatre on beholding so extraordinary a scene. Confounded by such an accumulation of facts, how shall I be able to answer them? Should I deny the truth of their statements? Then, to be consistent, I must cast a doubt, not only on the veracity of a Pliny, who was indeed suspected of being now and then overcredulous, but of a Seneca, of a Gellius, of an Aristotle, of a Cassiodorus, of a William of Paris, of an Isidore of Pelusium, yea, of the great Basil himself, all of whom attested these facts. But, should I yield the point, in what a predicament I should be! It would then be necessary for me to reascend this pulpit, and, like one frantic, to cry aloud to all present—Ah! the hearts of men! Ah, the hearts of Christian men! Come with me. I want you to accompany me yonder to those rocks, to those ravines, to those caverns, there to learn from the wild beasts the gratitude which it behooves you to show towards God. These same beasts, when treated kindly by you, become, if anything, more tame; they recognize your voice; they obey your dumb signs; they follow your steps; and they do not grind their teeth to tear you in pieces when you hold out your hand to feed them. “Even brute beasts are sensible of kindness.” And you act the very contrary to this in your behavior towards God. What does not God do, that He may gain your hearts, O ye sinners? What, I ask, does He not do? He is ever on the watch above, waiting to bless you, just as if you were His only care; and, far from being satisfied with providing

against your mere necessities, He wishes you all possible happiness. Hence how richly has He stored the earth for your benefit ! There are animals without number, some for entertainment, others for use ; plants of every variety, some for necessity, others for ornament ; mines inexhaustible, some for wealth, others for medicine. He has placed the different elements, every one of them, under your command, each to bring you its own valuable tribute. For you it is that He retains so many noble heavenly intelligences in constant service : for you it is that He keeps so many planets in perpetual motion, and so many brilliant stars ever on the watch. Never will He allow the rivers or the seas a moment's repose ; these also must be constantly at work for your advantage either to fertilize your meadows, to temper your climate, to convey your merchandise, or to appease your hunger. In short, for your sakes He holds the universe of created things in ceaseless agitation.

And, while He is thus blessing you with such an open bountiful hand, you are doing everything to offend Him ; nay, more, the more His liberality abounds towards you, the greater is your boldness in offending and insulting Him. This really seems something so extravagantly monstrous on your part, that, supposing me to be born but this day into the world and to hear it stated, I could never believe it ; and, were a writer of such allowed authority as Lactantius to meet me with this question, whether I was unacquainted with the fact, namely, "that God is chiefly forgotten by men at those very seasons, when living in the enjoyment of His blessings they ought most to honor Him for His Divine bounty," I think that I should tell Him flatly, I did not believe Him ; that the thing was downright false ; that it was quite impossible ; that it was the fabrication of some corrupt mind, or, at least, the hyperbole of some reckless

tongue. But woe is me! For, were he, in proof of his assertion, to appeal to the concurrent testimony of past ages, I should be compelled, after all, to acknowledge myself beaten, and that he was in the right.

3. Are we then strangers to the fact that men are most inclined to wickedness in the time of their prosperity? Hear how God complains of this by the mouth of Jeremiah: "They are become great and enriched; they are grown gross and fat." Hence, what followed? "They have most wickedly transgressed My words."* The Israelites, in their squalid and most degraded condition of bondage in Egypt, so constantly kept their faith with God, as never once, according to the verdict of all writers, to commit the very smallest act of idolatry; but, no sooner did they behold the obedient seas retiring before their feet, and the tributary clouds concocting food for their sustenance—no sooner did they perceive that for their sakes the night was illumined, the day overshadowed, the rocks dissolved, and the desert fertilized—no sooner did they begin to subdue the people with their power and to bind them fast under their dominion—than they instantly in their pride rebelled against the worship of the true God, and offered their incense to idols under every tree, and under every rock built their altars. "Israel is a vine full of branches (so spake Osee in his beautiful imagery); the fruit is agreeable to it; according to the multitude of his fruit he hath multiplied altars, according to the plenty of his land he hath abounded with idols."† Saul, who, as the shepherd of a flock, was the most modest and religious of men, when ruler of the people became the most overbearing and wicked. David, who as a persecuted outcast was blameless and

* Jeremiah v. 27, 28.

† Osee x. 1.

inoffensive, when settled on his throne proved an adulterer and a murderer. After attaining prosperity, a Solomon became an idolater; after concluding peace, an Ozias profane; after recovering health, an Ezechias ostentatious; after bearing a child, an Agar petulant; after gaining a victory, a Samson incontinent; and, in truth, we rarely find the man who remains in his prosperity that innocency for which perhaps he stood indebted to his adversity. And is not this tantamount to requiting the goodness of God with the most odious ingratitude? Hear what we read in Job of such characters: "They have said to God, depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways."* They say unto God, "Away, away! We desire to know nothing more concerning Thee. Depart from us." But when was it that these persons treated Him so wickedly? Was it when He afflicted them with want, when He brought them low with sickness? Quite the reverse. It was when He had "filled their houses with good things."* It was at the very time, when He was heaping upon them every blessing; or rather, after He had actually done this for them. For, so long as there remained any good to be got from Him, these mercenaries, these cormorants, never failed to treat Him with some deference; but adieu to all deference from them, their houses being once filled. They said unto God, Depart from us . . . yet He "had filled their houses with good things." Oh! what a sentence to pass upon Him! Does it not speak volumes?

4. But, not to waste more time in reproaching other people with their ingratitude when we have quite as much reason to blush on looking at home, in what language shall we speak of ourselves? Ah, my dear Christians, we have

* Job xxi. 24.

† Job xxii. 17, 28.

but to smite upon our breasts with our hands, and we shall most probably draw them back covered with leprosy, as it happened to Moses. What is my meaning? Why do we become better Christians when God graciously grants us our desires and supplies our wants? Take an instance. Do we not regard it as an immense favor when He is pleased to send us an abundant harvest? Our longing desire, during the year, has doubtless been that He would gild our fields with a goodlier display of corn, bend our vines under the weight of heavier clusters, enrich our orchards with a still more teeming progeny of fruit. Well, He grants us the blessings we have desired. And now, in what manner do we behave? Do we more diligently attend His worship? Perhaps, as Salvian remarks, we then hasten to church to give Him thanks. Perhaps we then load His altar with our gifts. Perhaps we then replenish the hungry with our alms; or, at least, we make a sacrifice of some inward darling lust to His honor. Perhaps we promise to lead a new life. Perhaps we enter upon a course of amendment. "I suppose that by the worship, the homage, the veneration, we offer to the Almighty, we labor at such times to make Him some suitable return for his benefits, conferred upon us." Judge for yourselves, says that incomparable man; so far from it, we behave worse than ever. "Should God grant us at any time fruitful seasons, tranquillity, and abundance, far beyond our requests, by such influx of prosperity we are corrupted; our morals degenerate to such a degree of pride, that we totally forget both Him and ourselves." In what respects? you ask. Why, our only thought then is, how we may best enlarge our farms and widen our cellars. Utterly regardless of the life to come, we then say to our souls, as did that millionaire in the Gospel: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine

ease, eat, drink, make good cheer." * "Come on; now is the time to make free, to launch out, and to enjoy the world. With such plenty of money in hand, now is the time, we say within ourselves, to perpetrate that act of revenge; now is the time to complete the conquest of that virgin innocence; now is the time fully to indulge that sensual lust; now is the time to gain over that judge; now is the time to bribe those officials." And so, by a process like this, incredible as you may think it, we scruple not at last to convert the blessings we have received from God into weapons of hostility against Him. For suppose that, after a long obstinate war, we conclude a happy peace: do we not immediately rush to the theatres, the revels, and the dances? Suppose that, after a severe protracted illness we recover perfect health: do we not at once fly off to gal lantries, intrigues, and dissipation? And is it not often the case that we who, when occupying a lower grade in society, were so respectful to all our neighbors, on finding ourselves promoted in the world either by some honorable title or some higher connection, immediately begin to assume consequence, to look fine, to despise ordinary people, and sometimes even to feel ashamed at being seen at those devotional meetings which before we used to frequent? How is it that men usually employ the intellect which God gave them for the acquisition of more useful knowledge, but in writing profane sonnets or trumpery romances? How do they employ the good sense, which God gave them for the purpose of more excellent counsels, but in evil devices and self-interested projects? How do they employ the influence which God gave them for their wider sphere of usefulness in doing good, but in cruel oppressions and the

* *St. Luke xii. 19.*

most unprincipled violence? Need I say more? We abuse health to the indulgence of our lusts: we make riches pander to our luxuries; we tarnish a fair reputation by the bad company we keep. This was St. Jerome's complaint in his day. And is not this to return God evil for good? It is doing precisely what that wretch of an officer, named Eurybatus, did; for, no sooner had he received an immense supply of money from Croesus, than he went and employed that very money in subsidizing an army of soldiers to fight against him. I can fancy I hear God exclaiming by the mouth of Osee, "I have strengthened their arms, and they have imagined mischief against Me."* How often, alas! may be seen among ourselves this same prodigy of ingratitude! We have no need to expose it further. Let us rather consider how best we may drive it out of the land.

5. To withhold from God your thanks for all His benefits, to dissemble your obligation to him for those benefits, to deny them, to forget them, are not these, beyond all doubt, very great sins? What, then, must it be to go yet further, and, in recompense for His benefits, to insult Him for them? How shocked and astounded you would be, were a man, on your making him some kind present, to repay you with a blow! Or, on your saving his life, were he, in return, to strike you with a stiletto! But put your own case out of the question. Did you witness any such violence offered to a third person, not to any kinsman, not to any fellow-countryman, nor to any acquaintance, but, say, to some perfect stranger, would you not be ready in a moment to resent it? Would not you invoke all the arrows of heaven, all the furies of hell, upon the head of

* Osee vii. 15.

the ingrate? Zeno cannot speak with moderation of Saul for his having attempted to kill David, just when, with his harp slung about his neck, he was endeavoring to comfort him. St. John Chrysostom can put no bounds to his indignation against Joseph's brethren for their taking counsel to murder him, just when he was bringing them food for their refreshment. I would, however, cite a case not so generally known.

Basil, the renowned Emperor of the East, went one day to hunt wild beasts in the sombre forest. He came across a stag of extraordinary size. He attacked it, brought it to a stand, and was on the point of raising his spear to despatch it. The stag, however, dexterously managed to evade the thrust, sprang forward, and turning sharp round fixed one of its antlers in the girdle of the emperor's waist; then, lifting him up above the ground, was within an inch of dashing him to pieces. A gentleman, who happened to be near, with a speed equal to his intrepidity, rushed to the spot, drew his sword, cut the girdle, and saved the emperor from immediate death. In the evening, the whole party returned to the palace; and, what had happened having got abroad, there was a general crowding about this valiant courtier; all were exchanging congratulations with him that he should be the happy man to save his prince's life. One supposed that he would be raised that very evening to the rank of a chief favorite; or, at least, enrolled among the principal nobility; another, foresaw the magnificent presents in store for him; another, the splendid alliances; another, the distinguished titles of honor; when the emperor, as it sometimes happens with persons who have reached the summit of worldly prosperity, disdaining in his mind to be thus deeply indebted to one so immeasurably his inferior—what, as the most ungrateful of mankind,

does he now do? He sends directly for his minister of justice, and under some pretext of the person's having dared to uplift his arm against him, orders that he should be taken out and publicly beheaded: nor had this order to wait long for its execution, to the utter amazement of the by-standers, who beheld the very man, whom they expected soon to see raised to a share of the imperial throne, struggling on a scaffold in the agonies of death! Such was the fact. Come now, and tell me, how does this case affect you? Does not your very heart and soul bound within you on hearing such things? The historians, who give us this narrative, Cedrenus and Zonaras, are quite unable to express their abhorrence of such an atrocity. How, then, does it affect you? Imagine this same miscreant to be now standing in front of you, in what way would you punish him? Could you refrain from falling on him, tearing him in pieces, dashing out his brains? I do not believe you could. For, when I read this story myself, I felt every drop of my blood fermenting within me. I was already aware (for Ecclesiasticus had told me as much) that "a man of an unthankful mind will *forsake* him that delivereth him;"* but I did not yet know that he would destroy him, that he would make an end of him. This is something intolerable. But, O heavens! what meaneth it, then, that you betray not an atom of these indignant feelings, when God is the person ill-treated! Has not God done you a service equal at least—equal, do I say?—infinitely, infinitely greater! What, after all, did the good service done to Basil amount to? On one single occasion his life was rescued from imminent death. But on how many, many occasions has not God saved your lives from

† Eccius. xxix. 21.

similar dangers? To what numerous perils have you not been exposed, since your birth, either by land or sea, from fire, from savage beasts, from devils, or from men? There was but an inch between you and the unfathomable pit, had God only commissioned some fever to suck your veins some cough to clog your windpipe, some cancer to gnaw your intestines, or some humor to settle on your heart. But, in the character of your generous champion, He has drawn His sword, "laid hand on the shield and buckler," and rescued you from every one of those creatures, which, as the agents of the Divine justice, were greedily clamoring for your blood. He has "risen up to help you."* And what return have you made Him for all this? Hear it from the Apostle. He will tell you, that you have taken the hammer, that you have taken the nails, and that you have again endeavored—(O terrible deed!)—to nail Christ to the Cross—"crucifying again to themselves the Son of God, and making a mockery of Him."† And are you not overcome with horror at such a thought? Do you not burn with indignation at yourselves for this, just as a moment ago you were all in a rage against Basil? And do not pretend to say in reply, that these are mere strong figurative expressions of the Apostle; but that, in sober matter of fact, you have never, at any time whatever, taken away the life of Christ from Him. What? Do you then conceive that these Nazarites, because they failed in taking away His life this morning, when He invisibly escaped from their hands, were not quite as guilty as if they had really succeeded; seeing how earnest they were in the attempt? And you, forsooth, have not taken away the life of Christ, because He is Blessed, because He has Immortality, because He is Impas-

* Ps. xxiv. 8.

† Heb. vi. 6.

sible ; otherwise, as far as in you lies, you are guilty of this every time that you commit a deadly sin ; for St. Thomas declares, that every time you commit a deadly sin, you are renewing and reproducing what nailed Christ at first to His Cross ; and that is the wrong done by you to God. "When you sin, you do what in you lies that Christ may be crucified again."

6. Be it, however, as you pretend. It comes then to this, that the only return you make Him for His numberless favors towards you is not to go the length of putting Him to death. Short of this, you do Him all the mischief in your power. To blaspheme His Name, to accuse His Providence, to persecute His servants, to despise His ministers, to profane His sacraments—are not these the common misdoings of sinful men ? O barbarous and desperate cruelty ! The people of Bethulia, saved by the hand of the valiant Judith from utter destruction, were not content to show their gratitude by only not killing her. They all with one accord blessed her and sang her praise. "And when she came to them, they blessed her with one accord, and said unto her, Thou art the glory of Jerusalem ; thou art the joy of Israel ; thou art the honor of our people !"* They contributed their costly presents ; they did her the utmost honor they could ; and, when she died, lamented her loss seven days with inconsolable grief. Nor was Pharaoh content with only not killing Joseph, by whose admirable foresight he had been warned of a terrible famine in time for him to provide against its ravages : he exalted him to the chief government of Egypt. Nor was Assuerus content with only not killing Mardochai, through whose sterling loyalty he had been informed of a secret conspiracy in time

* Judith xv. 9.

to arrest its progress : he advanced him to the highest dignities of Persia. Nor do we usually find any persons, who can satisfy themselves in producing to their benefactors this single token alone of their gratitude—that they have not taken from them their lives. You are the only persons to be found on the earth who can satisfy yourselves in this manner as to God : and, just as if this released you from all further obligation to Him, in return for His unnumbered favors, you make nothing of disobeying Him, nothing of reviling, blaspheming, degrading Him, and count it your delight and glory to heap upon Him the vilest indignities. And wherefore, oh, wherefore, is so great wrong done to a Being who is so good ? I know very well, St. John Chrysostom declares, that, were a man to render you only half the valuable services which you receive from God, you would not dare cause him the slightest displeasure : it would rather be your constant study to convince him of your most devoted attachment. What homage would you not pay a man, supposing him to have given you that fine property with which God has enriched your house ! Only think within yourself. If your health, which God has given you, had been given you by a man ; if your life, which God has prolonged to you, had been prolonged to you by a man ; is there any requital of your heart and affections that you would not strive to show him ? And why then do you not act on the same principle towards God ; but rather oblige Him to be every day repeating His old complaint, “ I have brought up children, and exalted them ; but they have despised Me ” ? * I have “ brought ” them up with so many natural endowments ; I have “ exalted ” them with so many spiritual gifts : “ but they have despised Me ” ! Can it pos-

* Isa. l. 2.

sibly arise from this circumstance, that to be grateful towards men is something more easy than to be grateful towards God? Were this the case, I would stop my complaints. But this, sirs, this is the worst of all; that we are often found most grateful towards men, towards whom it is so far more difficult to be grateful, and, at the same time, most ungrateful towards God, when the task, in comparison, is so far more easy.

7. Under the old Law, God forbade the Hebrews to offer Him fish in their sacrifices. Why was this? Are not fish very excellent and savory food? They are indeed, Tostatus will here answer me: but then, what a difficult thing it is to catch them. They live in the depths of the water; they have their sly unseen retreats to hide in, and cunning ways of making their escape. Let them therefore remain quiet as they are; for God wishes us to offer Him nothing but what is easy to procure. To the same effect, we read that He never required any of those animals, against which people are perpetually waging war in the forests, to be sacrificed to Him. True it is, that among the Gentiles they offered the wild boar to Neptune, the buck to Isis, the kid to Faunus, and the stag to Diana; but our God would have nothing for Himself, save animals of a domestic and pastoral life, such as calves, bulls, sheep, and lambs; and so among birds, none but doves and turtles only: nor did He ever, after the fashion of Heliogabalus, command that partridges, being so swift on the wing, or meleagris, being so extremely rare, should be His victims. And why, even on the more solemn sacrifices, would God put up with such commonplace fare, unless it were to teach us that He is not a Lord hard to please? Every little requital we make contents Him; every slight acknowledgment we bring suffices for Him; inasmuch as He principally looks on our

hearts. "If the will be forward, it is accepted according to that which it hath, and not according to that which it hath not":* so declares the Apostle. And therefore, beyond doubt, gratitude towards God is not so difficult a thing as it is towards men; who, being fastidious, never satisfied, and greedy beyond measure, will not be content with a bare token of respect from us, nor with an empty profession of our good-will, but will chiefly have regard to what our hands bring, rather than to what our hearts feel. Only conceive a scholar, or a client, or a sick patient saying, severally and respectively, to his master, to his lawyer, to his physician, "I have a great regard for you. I will pay every attention to your wishes, and be guided by your instructions." Conceive their making some such profession as this, would the master, or the lawyer, or the physician, think you, in ordinary cases, deem this sufficient? Certainly not. They would require, in addition, a remuneration for their services in the shape of good pay or a handsome present. And yet, what satisfies no one else satisfies God. The utmost He desires is that we should punctually observe those laws which He has given us for the good of our souls. "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments."† And even in regard to these He does not require of us impossibilities; nor does He expect any duty which we are physically unable to perform. If we cannot do one thing for Him, He will dispense with it, and accept something else in its stead. For as St. Augustine says, God "asks not a reward, but only His due honor." And does it not seem incredible that men should refuse Him even so slender a tribute of their gratitude as this; and that they should prefer giving the first place in their esteem to man, as if

* 1 Cor. viii. 12.

† St. Matt xix. 17.

those benefits, which we receive only second-hand from man, did not originally come from God, as their primary cause? This, nevertheless, is a fact. "I redeemed them," are His own sad words by Osee: "I redeemed them" from poverty, "I redeemed them" from sickness, "I redeemed them" from ignorance, "I redeemed them" from their low abject condition: "and they have spoken lies against Me!"* Yes; so it is, as long as they ascribe to any other than to Me the good I have done them; to any other, their riches; to any other, their health; to any other, their knowledge; to any other, their promotion. Oh, His excessive mortification! Oh, the hard lot He has to endure! Is not the wrong we thus do Him something quite unheard of?

8. And yet there is a step even beyond this. For it would not, in this matter, be so much for God to give place to man. This is the worst of all—believe me, my heart bursts while I say it—He must give place even to brute beasts! Wolves, incredible as it may appear, wolves, I say, those odious beasts, together with various reptiles and birds, were treated in Egypt with the highest distinction, and even worshipped for the few good services which they could render. These animals, however vile and despicable, could yet exact so much from a race of savages; and all for benefits, in reality no benefits whatever, since they never could have had the intention to oblige. And can God then obtain no more from us than this, that we do Him no harm? But why refer to the Egyptians? We ourselves—do we not make pets of our dogs and caress our horses, because they serve us so faithfully? And do we not consider it as something barbarous to hurt any animal when it does not hurt us? We know that the Athenian senators degrad-

* Osee vii. 13.

ed one of their nobles, because, when a poor little trembling bird, to escape the talons of an eagle, sought a shelter in his bosom, he cruelly drove it away. How comes it, then, that we can take a delight in offending God, while He not merely abstains from doing us any harm, but bestows upon us the most eminent favors? Alas! I must hide my face in shame for having been driven to such unworthy comparisons; for St. Jerome reminds me, that, "When things greater are put on the same level with things less, the contrast offered by the latter is an indignity done to the former." But can I help myself? What I have said, is it not perfectly true? How then, my dear fellow-sinners, do you account for such things? Can it be, because the person who shows us a kindness is God, that you cannot bring your minds to acknowledge Him as your benefactor? Yes; here it is: "I have loved you, saith the Lord; and you have said: Wherein hast Thou loved us?"* God is the only person, to whom we refuse to express our gratitude. To men we are grateful; to brute beasts we are grateful: only towards God will we show ourselves ungrateful; and not simply ungrateful, but injurious, but insolent, but profane. What other means, I ask you, has He left Him of gaining our affections, now that His past acts of kindness have all failed? Answer me this, my dear fellow-sinners, what else can He now do to win us? He loves you with an ardent longing love. He desires nothing else in the way He desires you. All His thoughts are bent upon making you happy. And therefore He might certainly have expected that you would be brought at last to love Him in return. But disappointed in this, after waiting so long, what must He do? Would you have Him enter upon a

* Malachias i. 2.

totally different mode of dealing with you?—no longer cause you to prosper, no longer protect you; but leave you to yourself to follow your own course to destruction? Let it not be so, my hearers; let it not be so with you. Oh, how intense the anguish you would thus inflict upon Him, were you to drive Him to such an extremity! For only reflect, why is it that your ingratitude so mightily displeases Him? It is because it has an effect upon Him similar to that produced by the most fatal of all winds, described by Ezechiel—"a burning wind," a wind capable of drying up a soil fertile and productive, as is the Divine goodness. This you will discover to be the true cause of the bitter complaints He makes of those who return Him evil for good. He does not complain on account of any loss He sustains Himself at their hands. It is not because they injure Him and affront Him; but because they render Him, in regard to themselves, dry and unproductive. "They repaid Me evil for good, to the depriving Me of My soul."* Ah, let us give Him ample scope to do us all the good He desires: and, in order to this, let us lose no time in showing Him how grateful we are for His mercies already received.

THE SECOND PART.

9. I was never more astounded in my life than when I read in Herodotus this extraordinary fact. That ancient writer makes mention of certain people in the world who bear so intense a hatred to the sun, that, when it rises, they go forth and meet it in a transport of fury, load it with invectives, pelt it with stones, and, like so many madmen, shoot at it with their arrows. What sort of people are these? you will ask me. Are they borderers on the North

* Pa. xxxiv. 12.

Pole, whom the sun has almost entirely deserted, a people who but seldom throughout the year behold its beams, who have the least share in its genial influences, the least enjoyment of its lustre and beauty? So far from this, the people whom you thus describe, whenever the sun appears over their heads, go forth to welcome its appearance with the joyful sounds of the viol, the tabret, and the pipe. The only people to hate the sun are discovered among those who live within a near view of it, in whose mines it generates the richest stores of silver and gold, in whose seas it produces the largest supply of coral and pearl—I mean the people on the shores of the Atlantic. I confess to you, my brethren, I looked upon this, when I read it, as nothing but the monstrous brutality of a set of people worse than fools, worse than madmen. But is not this the very way we treat God? St. Gregory says it is so: “Those who are most enriched beyond their deservings by the bounty of God, are the most rebellious against Him;”—they who receive from God the largest measure of comforts or of luxuries, are the persons to treat Him with a proportionate baseness and contumely. How can we account for this barbarous ingratitude? Let us endeavor by all the means in our power to find out whence it proceeds. And yet we need not give ourselves this trouble; for those ungrateful persecutors of their generous fellow-countryman—the Nazarites of to-day’s Gospel—have kindly told us the reason. What induced them to act so wickedly, so treacherously, towards Him? We shall find, on consideration, that they suspected Him to be not so much their friend as their competitor. So it is explained by the most learned Maldonatus. When they heard Him reproving their sins, it seemed to them as if He thereby threatened to transfer the blessings of true religion from Judaism to the Gentiles. Hence, they were in a mo-

ment up in arms, just as if He was actually **taking away** what He had before given them—"And they arose, filled with anger, because they understood Christ here to intimate, that the grace of God would be transferred from the Jews to the Gentiles."

Behold then here, my brethren, the real cause, which produces our too common ingratitude towards God. We suspect Him of a wish to take away our property ; just as if it would not have been equally easy to Him, in the first instance, never to have given us what now we so terribly fear He will take away. Conceive the case of a father whom God has blessed with fine promising sons. Why, as an ungenerous return for the same, does he bring up those sons so badly, so disinclined to study, so averse to religion, so abandoned in their habits ? It arises from a certain fear in his mind, lest, should he act differently, they might take some religious vow ; and so in this way God would deprive him of what He had before given him. Conceive the case of a nobleman whom God has enriched with a splendid fortune. Why is he also, as a most illiberal recompense for the same, so grasping ? so estranged from the poor ? so hard with his servants ? so deaf to the claims of religious charities ? It arises from a certain fear in his mind, lest some day he should become poor ; and so that in this way God would reduce him to poverty from his former state of affluence. This is one of the chief reasons why men behave so very meanly towards God. They suspect Him to be their enemy, after all He has done to prove Himself their friend. Only allow such a distrust of God once to possess your mind, and its consequences will be most fatal. Into what enormities may it not betray us ? Into what criminal excesses may it not plunge us **headlong** ?

Let us trace this in the life of Jeroboam, whose history would be scarcely credible, were it not a matter of faith, as being recorded in the Scriptures, where you may read it for yourselves at 3 Kings xi. Jeroboam was the servant of Solomon, so entirely devoted to his interests, that the possibility of his succeeding his master in the greater part of his kingdom must have been the very last thing he would ever dream of. Be this as it may, God sent Ahias the prophet expressly to assure him, during Solomon's lifetime, that he should be set over ten tribes; since two tribes were to be reserved, for David's sake, to his grandson Roboam: that of Judah the chiefest, and that of Benjamin the least among them. On the death of Solomon, God immediately kept this promise to the letter. Who now, under such circumstances, would not have felt certain that the new Sovereign would henceforth put his trust in God, in preference to any one else? God by a special act of grace had elected him to this high honor. God had actually invested him with its prerogatives. God, by inclining the hearts of his subjects to his allegiance, had confirmed him in its full possession. And, besides all this, God had revealed to him that, on his only continuing faithful, the sceptre should not depart from his house; that He Himself would direct him in counsel, defend him in war, and deliver him in the hour of danger; in a word, that He would abundantly gratify every wish he could reasonably entertain: "Thou shalt reign over all that thy soul desireth." Surely every person, on knowing this, would say, "Well, we may be quite confident that Jeroboam will manage to keep on good terms with God. Oh, what a devout Prince we shall have! Oh, how religious, how well behaved, how zealous he will be!" And yet, who would have believed it?—Only a short time elapsed, and there was not a human being upon whom this wretch be-

gan to look with greater suspicion, jealousy, and distrust than he did upon God. Scarcely seated on his throne, he must needs fancy, that if he allowed the ten tribes still to attend the stated feasts and sacrifices at Jerusalem, such a liberty might ultimately pave the way for their rebelling against him, and renewing their allegiance to Roboam, their natural prince, by reason of the inclination all people have more readily to obey one born than one made their king. Accordingly, by a public decree he interdicts all pilgrimages to the temple, all attendance on its worship: but then, on the other hand, considering it to be necessary that his subjects should have some sort of religious worship, whether true or false, to keep them under the restraints of conscience, to put them in fear, or, at least, so to occupy their thoughts as to give them a disrelish and want of pluck for a mutiny and insurrection, what does this reckless politician do? He makes two golden calves; one of them he places in Dan, the other in Bethel. Then, after he had assembled the tribes at a most solemn sacrifice, “Behold,” he cries aloud in the midst of them—“Behold thy gods, O Israel, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, and fed thee in the wilderness. Now therefore take good notice, these are to be your gods, to whom you must for the future burn your incense. It is to them you must present your oblations. It is to them you must offer your prayers. And so there will be no more long, tiresome, needless journeys for you to make to Jerusalem.” Could he have adopted a more artful policy? By this manœuvre he succeeded in alienating his subjects, as a body, from the worship of the true God; and, as for himself, there were no reproofs, no menaces, no chastisements, no supernatural signs, which could ever induce him to place the least reliance on God: on the contrary, to his very last hour he stood in apprehen-

sion of Him, just as if God had been, of all others, his greatest opponent, rather than his most signal benefactor. Would you believe it possible, Christians, that any man could carry his distrust to such a length? And yet it is with us a matter of faith that Jeroboam really did so; and the Nazarenes also in to-day's Gospel did the same: and, like these persons, oh, how many, oh, how many are doing the very same thing, secretly at least in their minds, if not openly in the sight of the world!

10. Sinners, ye most ungrateful among men, wherefore all this distrust? If God did not take a delight in seeing you happy, why should He ever have dealt with you so tenderly, so bounteously, so munificently? Why, on this supposition, did He create you, when you were nothing? And why did He redeem you, when you were in bondage? And why did He clothe you, when you were naked? And why did He bear with you, when you were so obstinately disobedient to His laws? What foolishness then it is in you, after all this, to suspect Him of a wish to take away from you what you possess, and, under such a notion, to return Him evil for good, as if this ungrateful and offensive behavior towards Him was the surest way for you to hold fast what you have got in spite of Him? Did He really wish to deprive you of your riches, could anything be more easy? Why then, to prevent your being deprived of them, do you so unfeelingly rob His poor of their share? Did He really wish to snatch your sons from you, could anything give Him less trouble? Why then, in order to keep them to yourself, do you make a point of estranging them from His service? Is it not in His power, when and how He may please, to divest you of your honors, your connections, and your position in life, even your princely rank, if you have such to lose? Why then do you seek to secure

106 *Ingratitude of Man towards God.*

yourselves in the possession of these advantages by means of such unworthy expedients, to the reproach of His commandments, to the sacrifice of all religious principle ? Ah, once for all, let us allow Him to be our true friend, our only benefactor. Let us render Him, I entreat you, love, not hatred ; honor, not insult. And so, if the thing be possible, no future preacher will again have to do that injury to God which most entirely against my own will I have done Him this morning, by proving to you that there are people existing on the earth capable of rewarding Him evil for good.

SERMON V.

ON GAINING A BROTHER.

"If thy brother shall offend against thee, go and rebuke him between thee and him alone : if he will hear thee, thou shalt gain thy brother."
—S. MATT. XVIII. 15.

1. AMONG the numerous precepts enjoined by Christ, as peculiar to the law of the Gospel, there is not one, in my opinion, which we ought to hear with more satisfaction, and to obey with a more thoroughly congenial spirit, than this of brotherly correction. For who is not conscious how prone we all are by nature to reprove the faults of others ? Although the sun be so far distant from the earth, and his operations so magnificent, yet the inquisitiveness of man has at length succeeded in detecting some dark spots on his surface. These it has noted down with exactness ; these it has proclaimed with insolence ; these it has condemned in triumph : and, in so doing, it has clearly exposed the delusion of certain persons, who hope to evade its strict, unsparing scrutiny, on account of their high rank or their established reputation in the world. And yet, notwithstanding this, how few Christians are there who obey this precept ! There is at present no lack in Christendom of modern Davids, who commit adultery ; but where is the Nathan at hand to denounce them ? There is no lack of modern Achabs, who usurp another man's property ; but where is the Elias on the spot to rebuke them ? Where is the Baptist to confront our many incestuous Herods ? Where the Chrysostom, our many proud Eudoxas ? Where

the Theophilus, our many profane Leos? Where the Dunstan, our many sensual Edwins? Where the Ambrose, our many bloody Theodosiuses? Ah! this wondrous inclination of man to condemn the wickedness of his neighbor—how does it all evaporate either in anonymous letters, family gossip, or disgraceful libels, such as tend to irritate rather than to reclaim the offender! Meanwhile, there is not a single person to be found who dares go and tell him of his excesses face to face; but all, like dogs unfaithful to their trust, will bark at the robber when once his back is turned.

It therefore becomes my duty this morning to stir up your zeal in this matter to the utmost of my power. Am I not bound to do this? But then, can I hope to succeed? You will at once stoutly maintain against me that, to your knowledge, a case scarcely ever now happens when you are obliged by your interference to correct other people; that you have read St. Thomas, that you have consulted learned theologians, and that they are all on your side. Well, if this be so, and if I am to preach to you at all, I have only one ground left me to take. I must combat this same principle of yours, that you are to do nothing for the benefit of souls because you are not *obliged* to do so. And a wondrous fine argument it is! I perceive that Christ Himself, in the Gospel for the day, when He would move us to this brotherly correction, does not employ any threats or scolding, alarming language on the subject. He does not say, "Do this, for I *oblige* you to do it under severe penalties." No; He simply states, that by such conduct we may possibly at times save others. "If he shall hear thee, thou shalt gain thy brother." Oh! my beloved Christians, that we could understand the preciousness of this gain—to save a soul! Take my word for it, you

would be quite ashamed to say, "Let who will convert him : it is no business of mine. I am under no such obligation." But, let us see whether I cannot demolish this wicked pretence. And pray attend to me ; for, could I succeed in kindling within your bosoms, laymen as ye are, any such zeal as befits your station in life, I should not only *gain* those present, but should hope, through their instrumentality, to *gain* others also who are now absent. And thus I make you my apostles.

2. Scarcely had the noble-minded Judith made her appearance in the camp of the Assyrians, than the soldiers, even the rudest and roughest among them, as if suddenly smitten with an extraordinary flash of light, were all ravished on beholding her surpassing beauty. When they remarked the modesty of her expression, the elegance of her carriage, and the sweetness of her voice, they broke out with one accord in words to this effect : "Who can despise the people of the Hebrews, who have such beautiful women, that we should not think it worth our while for their sakes to fight against them ?" * "Who would be such a dolt as to despise a people whose women are so charming ? Let their Bethulia be cradled over our heads on the precipitous heights among the splintered rocks, it would not be the least fatigue to scale them in pursuit of such lovely prey ! Forward, then. Why need we wait for the trumpet's call ? Holofernes has only to plan the attack in the most desperate manner ; he has only to order us into the thickest and hottest of the siege ; and who will count it anything for the sake of a single Judith ?" Thus these poor soldiers talked together in their mad, infatuated way. And really, one might treat their words as so much passionate hyperbole,

did we not know that, for the sake of a fair countenance, wars still more savagely conducted have been occasioned in the world. For whom did the battle rage so fiercely under the walls of Troy, but for a false smiling Helen? For whom, under Thebes, but for a Teano? For whom, under Cirra, but for a Megisto? not to speak of the famous battles between Eneas and Turnus for their Lavinia, between Antigonus and Ptolemy for their Cleopatra. But O ye heavens! how is it that I cannot now enlighten the minds of these dear hearers of mine to discern the beauty of a soul? What are the Cleopatras! What the Lavinias! What the Megistos! What the Teanos! What the Helens! What the Judiths! Their external beauty was but like the flower of the field, that dies away as soon as it is born; a delusion of the mind, a fascination produced by the tongue, a snare to catch unguarded souls. It was a bait, that enticed, but only to destroy; it was a sword, that glittered, but only to kill. True beauty belongs but to the soul, as being made after the likeness of the Divine countenance. St. Augustine inquires: "In what respect is man made after the image of God? In his body?—no; but in his mind, his inner man, his capacity to know truth." Therefore, if I could set before your eyes a soul in all its native loveliness, you would most certainly be ravished into an ecstasy of admiration, and would be instantly forced to exclaim, "Let us endure toil and labor, let us spend our very lives, for the sake of an object so beautiful." This indeed was the prize coveted by the great Apostle, when he wished to be separated from Christ for the good of his brethren—to *gain his brethren!* This was the reward longed for by the great bishop St. Martin, when he offered himself to remain on earth for the good of his flock—to *gain his brethren!* This was the recompense which the

seraphic virgin St. Catharine of Sienna sighed for, when she said that she would place herself willingly in the very mouth of hell, provided only that she could obstruct it so that no soul could enter any more. What can you urge in reply to this, ye who refuse to take the least thought about saving others, because you are not *obliged*? By speaking in this way, do you not only expose your own ignorance as to what a soul is? What idea of it have you formed in your minds? What is the value you put upon it? Alas! your language only indicates the mean estimate at which you rate it: for, if you allow your pity to be excited when you see a lamb within the devouring jaws of a wolf, or a dove between the talons of a voracious hawk, how is it possible for you to contemplate a soul in the gripe of the infernal dragon, and yet not be moved to pity by it? You are under no obligation to help it. Well. Only remember, that this acquits you from the charge of injustice; it by no means clears you from the reproach of cruelty.

3. Yet what am I saying? Have patience with me; for, if the case be so, I shall present my appeal to the cross of Christ, and I shall tell Him to come down from that cross, to which He suffered Himself to be nailed for our salvation. For how was this? Was He under any obligation to save us; and to save us at the cost to Himself of so great pain, agony, and bloodshed? Ah! surely not. Isaiah exclaims in His name, "He was offered, because He was willing." He became the victim in our stead, it is true; but because He was willing—which is tantamount to the saying of S. Chrysostom: "Christ could have avoided all the pains He suffered, had He minded only to consider His own interests. But this He would not do. He looked on our interests, and not on His own." If then He, who was in no sense obliged to do this, yet was content to do it, and to do it in a way so

grievous to Himself, how can we refuse to exert ourselves for His sake in the salvation of others, on the ground of our not being obliged? Ah! the obdurate hearts of Christians, so full of ingratitude! Behold the utmost that a God, crucified for our sakes, is able to procure from us in return. We will consider nothing but what interests ourselves, without any regard to Him. "He truly," as the same holy man observes, "studies beyond everything else to save the world. His chief concern is the salvation of souls." He looks about Him everywhere for fellow-helpers. In order to this, He would raise a noble band of volunteers to go with Him. And can we find it in our hearts to refuse Him?

Scipio Africanus, when about to leave Rome on the enterprise against Numantia, attended with so great hazard, found such vast numbers of persons who, for the love they bore his name, willingly, without any view to wages or remuneration, offered to accompany him, that, in order to repress the general enthusiasm, it was necessary for the Senate, as Plutarch relates, to issue a public decree on the subject; the fear being lest Italy should, to a man, be deserted. What shall I say of a Pompey? What of a Cæsar? What, in a still higher sense, of an Alexander, who thirsted so insatiably after fresh conquests? This aspiring hero found no difficulty in raising recruits, who would have followed him to the utmost extremity of the earth. Let Libya be burnt up with drought, let Scythia be frozen with cold; yet over these regions could he lead his devoted soldiers, at one time plunged up to their necks in water, at another seen clinging with their hands to the precipices that obstructed their march. And then, what a proof had Cato of his men's attachment to him, as they traversed the most barren and sandy deserts in the world! Before he

ventured to set foot on them, he assembled his army, and having candidly enumerated the perils and hardships into which he was leading them, he then permitted any one who chose to leave his standard. Nevertheless—would you believe it?—not even a single man was there among them whose brave heart did not cling to him, and who, in their subsequent march through a hideous population of vipers, horned serpents, and amphisbœnas, would not have much sooner died than made his escape from those dangers.

What then does this mean, my hearers, that our Lord Christ should fail in obtaining from us what many other leaders, so immeasurably His inferiors, have procured from their people? He too is ardently impatient for the conquest of the world, though from quite an opposite motive; His aim being to save, and not to destroy. And yet, for all this, what is the fact? Ezechiel, in deep sorrow of heart, tells us: "Blow the trumpet, let all be made ready; yet there is none to go to the battle."* He finds it very hard to prevail upon a single person readily to follow Him, and nobly to volunteer under His banner—to *go to the battle*. No: we need the spur; we require a positive injunction; we must be obliged to do so. And is this, dear sirs, a matter for us to be proud of, that we are unwilling to render our Saviour Christ any service, save that only to which we are obliged? Is this, then, the acknowledgment we make of His claims upon us? Is this, then, the sense we entertain for His mercies towards us?

4. But wait awhile: for I am well aware of the existence of a more mercenary class of people, who will abandon adventures to which they are not obliged, when these adven

* vii. 24.

tures are not likely to turn to their profit. Still, when they are really profitable—in a high degree too and for certain—who ever declines to engage in them because he is not obliged? But, O ye heavens! Is not, then, the recovery of a wicked sinner profitable to us far beyond every other gain? It is an undoubted fact that one such wicked sinner often suffices to inflame the anger of God against a whole community, however in itself guiltless. "For the sin of one person wrath descends upon an entire people": so Origen declared, grounding his doctrine on many examples of Scripture; and, though I by no means pretend to any skill in teaching to be compared with his, yet I too can produce my examples. The Israelites had assaulted the city of Jericho with complete success. Eager to follow up their victory, they pressed forward to Hai, a city far inferior to Jericho both in strength and renown. But behold them suddenly repulsed by the enemy, and forced to an ignominious retreat! A loud murmur, accompanied with evident demonstrations of grief and mortification, now spreads rapidly through the whole camp. Not aware of the cause for which God had thus immediately withdrawn His favor from a people whom He had Himself expressly sent into the field to reap the fruits and carry off the palm of victory, Josue reverently prostrates himself before the Ark. He prays, he weeps, he humbles himself before it. And at length the truth comes out. And what, think you, was it?—that the Israelites had conspired to make a second golden calf? that they had eaten something unclean? that they had polluted themselves with heathen women? Nothing of the kind, my hearers. Their sad and lamentable discomfiture was found to arise from a far less aggravated crime—a crime, too, in which they were not all, nor even many of them. impli-

cated, but only a single individual. The story is remarkable. While Jericho, already laid waste, was falling a prey to the fire and flame, a common soldier of the name of Achan, happened to spy a rich purple Babylonian garment among the spoils. He coveted it, he stole it; and, in disobedience to the express order of his general, he privily snatched it from the burning, and hid it in his tent. Would you believe it? On account of this one criminal—unobserved, too, as he was—God conceived so furious a wrath against the whole army as to threaten them with the total forfeiture of His favor, unless they joined hand in hand to put the guilty person to death. “I will be no more with you”—what terrible language!—“till you destroy him that is guilty of this wickedness.”* So true it is, as Salvian happily observes on the narrative, that “the welfare of all suffers for the wickedness of one.” Achan stole a part of the accursed thing. And what followed? His crime entailed a judgment on the whole community. Yes, sirs; “for the sin of one person wrath descends upon an entire people.” But I have more to urge in proof of this. On account of one Jonas, did not all who sailed with him to Tharsis suffer? On account of one Judas, did not all the disciples who passed with him over the lake incur danger? And on account of one David, too much elated in his mind after he had numbered the people, to what a frightful massacre was not that same people sentenced, just as if they themselves had been guilty! It is therefore but too true that “for the sin of one person wrath descends upon an entire people.”

You must now see quite clearly what I am calling you to, when I exhort you this morning to attempt the conver-

* *Jen. vii. 29.*

sion of a sinner. I am calling upon you to deliver every individual of your company from those calamities which, on account of that sinner, may even now be hanging over your own heads. An earthly judge has no power to punish men for the faults of others. But God can do this; and, if we are to credit St. Augustine, God will certainly do it; if but for this reason alone, that we have failed in the duty of correcting the faults of our brethren. St. Augustine's words are these: "How do you account for it that, as the same sickle cuts down the flowers and the grass in a field, and the same hail-storm smites the good grapes and the wild in a vineyard, so God involves indiscriminately in the same destruction the innocent with the guilty?" Hear the reason: "It is to prevent people from caring only about themselves; to teach them the necessity of their being concerned for others also; and that they should, as it happens in a single body and a single man, like different members, exchange a mutual sympathy." Is it not, therefore, quite useless for you to tell me that you must decline all endeavors to convert souls, because you are not obliged? Why, a common cause is here at stake. What I propose is a public concern. It involves the interest of us all, and therefore of yourself. And yet you persist in asking, "Under what obligation am I to do this?" Only suppose you see a row of houses in your immediate neighborhood wrapt in a blaze of fire. Do you not instantly run to procure water, though certainly there is nothing to oblige you? Do you not strain every nerve in giving directions? Do you not work hard in lending help? Now, all I want is to see you acting on the same principle in regard to souls. So long as your neighbor is living in sin, be assured the fire is blazing close to you. Run, therefore, strain every nerve, do all you possibly can: for it is high time you should look

to yourself when the house next yours is already in flames.*

5. But this, after all, is only proposing to you a certain negative gain. It is only to save yourself from a particular calamity, and to prevent your suffering. The positive gain over and above this, of the very highest value, is the point that ought rather to be considered. For, if I am to give you my opinion, the particular good work which is most acceptable in the sight of God, and most meritorious beyond every other, is the conversion of a sinner. But my opinion is not so much wanted. Hear what Gregory the Great declares: "Let the man who, by the grace of God, has cast off the bondage of sin from his own soul, apply himself to encourage other sinners to seek forgiveness: for there is no sacrifice," he goes on to say, "so acceptable to God, as a zeal to save souls." And, in truth, from what other good work can you expect such an amount of merit? You say, perhaps—from fasting. But who was ever stricter in fasting than Christ, who accordingly passed entire months without tasting food—"when He had fasted forty days"†—and yet to save souls He frequented the publican's table, sumptuous as it was, and, laying aside His usual strictness, ate and drank so cheerfully as to incur the odium of being "a gluttonous man." Perhaps, then—from praying. But who was ever more devoted to prayer than Christ, who accordingly passed whole nights without taking rest—"He passed the whole night in the prayer of God"‡—and yet, to save souls, He received even midnight visits from Nicodemus and persons of his stamp, being ready to break off His own fervent supplications that He might patiently listen to their discourse, allowing them to prolong it,

* *Nam tua res agitur, paries cum proximus ardet.*—*Horat.* (lib. i. ep. 18).

† *St. Matt. iv. 2.*

‡ *St. Luke vi. 12.*

though it betrayed so much stupidity. Well, perhaps—from almsgiving. The great Chrysostom shall decide this point between us, himself one of the most warm-hearted, tender friends the poor were ever blessed with. Yet, notwithstanding this, hear what he says: “You may spend magnificent fortunes in charity to the poor; but you will be doing more good by converting a single soul.” He asserts that “the conversion of one soul exceeds in value the utmost bounty in almsgiving.” Nor is there anything to surprise us in this; for he who relieves the poor has stayed a sense of hunger; but he who reclaims an erring brother has destroyed the power of sin. One has saved bodies from pain; the other, souls from hell. Oh! the difference there is, my hearers, between saving bodies from a momentary suffering and saving souls from an everlasting fire! If, therefore, we are to judge of the value of any good work by the extent of the advantage it confers, can it once admit of a question, that to rescue souls ruined by sin is something far more meritorious than to relieve bodies oppressed with indigence?

You may, however, urge that the building of churches, the endowment of chapels, the enriching of sacristies, after the splendid example of the Charlemagnes, the Carlomans, and the Pepins, would be an act of still greater merit before God. No, no, my hearers. The wretched sinner, whom you present unto Him, and humbly cast at His feet in the character of a true penitent, would prove an offering far more precious than any of these. For, are you aware of the ultimate consequences to which this would lead? Precisely such as befell Cimon, the famous Greek general, as Plutarch beautifully tells the story. Cimon had gained a signal victory over the Persians; and having, on his return to Athens, to part company with the principal officers, his comrades in the

war, he collected together the spoils they had taken, and divided them all into two lots. On one side he arranged the trophies of the vanquished foe—shields, helmets, cuirasses, scimitars, quivers of untold value, gorgeous purple robes, vessels of silver, collars of gold. On the opposite side he placed a multitude of prisoners; but all of them in a state of nudity, so that it was quite pitiful to look at them, as they stood there, sadly disfigured by their wounds, and emaciated through the hardships of the campaign. Then, turning to his brother officers: "Choose," he said, "between the two. To me, as commander-in-chief, the refusal properly belongs; but I surrender it to you." The officers proceeded to deliberate; when, dazzled with the shining silver and the magnificent gold, without the least hesitation they fixed their choice on the costly trophies; laughing within themselves at Cimon, for whom nothing was now left for his share but a beggarly refuse of denuded men, as good as half dead. But what followed? Cimon, having got them all healed of their wounds, for every single one of their company straightway obtained so large a ransom, as to prove the far superior value which a human being possesses, from his very nature, over any other species of property. Are you now willing, my hearers, to act upon my advice? Take in, then, a stock of sinners; take the most ill-favored, take the most wretched, the most destitute you can lay your hands on in all the city. Set to work in getting them healed; and, when this is done, bring them to Christ; and rest fully assured that for every one of their number He will bestow on you a reward, far exceeding what He would ever give were you to go to Him laden with jewels and pearls of the most transcendent rarity and costliness.

Are these things really so? Why, then, let us apply the

matter under discussion between us. If to procure our neighbor's salvation, to gain a brother, be a work of such rare merit as to be greater than fasting, greater than praying, greater than almsgiving—in a word, to surpass every other virtuous action we can perform—how is it possible for you, knowing this, as you do, to decline engaging in it because you are not obliged? Seemeth this to you a sufficient or a prudent excuse? Is it not rather that kind of excuse which, if meaning anything, would go the length of justifying you in not managing your farm with so much industry, in not employing your capital with so much caution, because, let the prospect of remuneration be as promising and tempting as you please, yet you lie under no obligation to be so industrious in the one instance or to be so cautious in the other?

6. But—to cut the matter short—who ever told you that you are not obliged to gain souls? If you have never tempted a soul into sin, I will readily allow this to be the case; but, if you have, whether by your enticements to what is evil, or by your supplying the knowledge of it, or even by your mere tacit approval of it, then I cannot exempt you from this obligation. Have you robbed God of a soul? You are therefore bound, in all reason, to restore Him some other soul instead. Under the ancient Law, God commanded His people that, if any took away the life of a beast, his neighbor's property, he lay under an obligation to make good the loss by giving him a like beast in return: an ox, for an ox; a lamb, for a lamb; a beast of burden, for a beast of burden. "He that killeth a beast shall make it good, that is to say, shall give beast for beast."* And yet, there surely were not wanting many

* Lev. xxiv. 18.

other methods more expeditious than this strict law of retaliation whereby to repair the damage done to a neighbor. But, let me ask, in what other way could you expect to satisfy God for a soul you have taken from Him? Go, I beg you, fish in the Erythrean Sea for all the pearls secreted in its bosom; go, and offer to God the most magnificent specimens to be found of Phrygian silks, Numidian marbles, Assyrian perfumes, and Sidonian purples: they all are nothing when compared to the single soul that you have ruined. "Even the whole world," said St. Gregory, "is no equivalent commutation for a soul." And St. Ambrose, to the same effect: "The entire universe is no adequate price for a soul." A soul restored is the only reparation for a soul taken away, inasmuch as both were purchased at an equal cost by the Redeemer; and therefore, should you be conscious of having ever caused the ruin, it may be, of more than one single soul, how dare you exempt yourself from the obligation of converting to God at least the same number? There must be restitution, my hearers; there must be restitution!—A soul for a soul, a soul for a soul!

Only consider, how many corrupt maxims may have escaped your lips from time to time to the detriment of your hearers; and what scandals you may have caused in your day, whether by your bad life, licentiousness, love of pleasures, and loose talk. And how is it then that, dismayed at the idea of having robbed Christ of more than a single one of His followers, you do not strenuously apply yourself, in the hope of being soon able to fall down before His feet, saying: "Lord, I have indeed alienated that righteous soul from Thee. Behold, instead of him, I bring Thee this sinner!" These were the very engagements which King David, when penitent, made with God. He promised to instruct the wicked, to convert the transgressors: "I will

teach the unjust thy ways : and the wicked shall be converted to thee."* Now what obliged him to do this? Was it, then, the proper business of a soldier, like David, a man of war from his youth, to go about preaching to sinners? His business was not to explain the Catechism, but to set the battle in array, to plan the siege, to head the assault, to order the fight. True ; but then poor David remembered how frequently by the publicity of his offences he had caused many to blaspheme the name of God—the charge expressly brought against him—"Thou hast given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme."† Hence, as some commentators remark, he felt as if he could never after find courage to face his God, unless he were able to sanctify just as many sinners to His service as he had once scandalized from it. The same motive constrained the Arnobiuses, the Hilarys, the Cyprians, the Justins, who were at first the enemies of our faith, to write so many volumes afterward in its defence ; and if a Paul, that he might extend the bounds of the primitive church, labored more than the other Apostles, what was his motive? Because at first he had persecuted it. "He, who was before a persecutor," to use the words of St. Gregory, "labored afterwards more than the rest." Let therefore no one among you flatter himself as to the sufficiency of his repentance, so long as he makes no endeavor to benefit others as much by his holy zeal as he before injured them by his evil counsels, his vicious allurements, and his scandalous conversation. What then have you to do, my hearers? Why further wait? why longer delay? *Gain your brethren ! Gain your brethren !* Is it that you cannot bring yourselves, supposing you to have the will, to think that you

* Ps. l. 15.

† 1 Kings xii. 14.

have the power to benefit your neighbor, even in matters of the deepest importance? Oh! the good, oh! the immense good you are able to do him! I speak to you, ye cavaliers; I speak to you, ye ladies; I speak to those who occupy among us even a lower station.

7. I am quite aware that my sermon to-day will be condemned by most of my hearers, as being ill adapted to their rank in life, as out of character, as over-zealous, and better suited to the case of those enthusiastic missionaries, who spare nothing, but pursue vice to its most secret dens and corners. But you are mistaken in this. Hear the lesson inculcated equally on all persons in the Book of Ecclesiasticus: "Recover thy neighbor, according to thy power" *—according to thine ability; not, observe, other men's power, but thine: according to thy capacities, according to thy knowledge, according to thy station in life. St. Gregory here very seasonably resumes the subject: "Let no one say, I am not competent to give advice. I have not the power to exhort. Do what you can." I readily grant it is no business of a layman to ascend the pulpit and to cry aloud, as we do. Still, how often may you find yourself in a society where people are plotting something offensive to God; for instance, to overreach an honest man, to spread a calumnious report, to contrive a revengeful project, to weave an artful imposture? And, on occasions like these, have you not the power—I do not say to make a dash at these wretches, javelin in hand, in the style of a modern Phinees, † but calmly to reprimand them, if your authority will carry you so far; or, if not, dexterously to divert them from their purpose by your remonstrances, or by the objections and discouragements you throw in their way?

* xxix. 26.

† Numb. xxv. 7.

Thus will you be following the example of that affectionate Juda, who, when he despaired of being able to induce his brethren to forgive the unoffending Joseph, persuaded them to rest satisfied with doing him a lesser injury, by selling him to the Ishmaelite merchants. *

The general advice which I have thus given to all, I would now commend to individuals. Art thou then a cavalier, with thy girded sword? "Recover thy neighbor, according to thy power." How is it that thou canst not reconcile those two noblemen who are bent upon each other's destruction? Why not prevail upon them to exercise mutual forbearance on Christian principles, before they are both ruined for a point of mere worldly honor? Art thou a citizen in the midst of thy traffic? "Recover thy neighbor, according to thy power." How is it that thou canst not fly to the rescue of that female chastity, on the verge of the utmost peril? Why not secure with thy golden key its entrance into some honorable cloister, before it plunges into disgrace and misery? And who art thou? A lady, whom duty keeps shut up at home. This is of no consequence whatever. "Recover thy neighbor, according to thy power." Oh! the good that it is in thy power also to do, by forwarding the salvation of others, if thou wilt train up thy children in a love for religion! By this means, thou wilt not only easily gain their souls, but, together with theirs, the souls of many others. For, who shall say whether, as the blessed effect of this religious training, one of your sons may not feel inclined to devote himself to the Church, and thereby prove a most honored instrument, in his after-life, of bringing souls to glory.

Have you not all heard of Anna, so celebrated in the

* Gen. xxxvii. 27.

Scriptures? By dint of her importunity in continual fasting, weeping, and mourning, she had given birth to a single child, Samuel: when, behold, just as if she had surpassed Lia herself in fruitfulness, this mother pours out the joy of her heart in a triumphant song, speaking of herself as coming at last to be *the barren woman who had born many*. But was this the fact? Can a single Samuel be counted *as many*? Yes, answers Eutimius, "one holy person, like Samuel, was equivalent to many." Who, indeed, can ever count the many souls whom such a holy man, though standing alone, might not make holy as well? Thus you see in what way you have it in your power to gain numbers. You have only to provide that your son may possess this power. But—to speak more to the point—is not prayer to God in behalf of sinners a most effectual means, as St. James taught, of converting them? "Pray one for another, that you may be saved."* Paul had some experience of this. Not won by the fervent eloquence of Stephen, he was won by his prayers. Augustine had some experience of this. Not converted by the unceasing persuasions of Monica, he was converted by her tears. And, dear sirs, is there a person present who has not the power to promote most effectually in this manner, if he only desires it, the salvation of his neighbors? Whatever the supplication you offer, whatever the act of self-denial or spiritual self-discipline you exercise, keep the salvation of others steadily in your view. On receiving Holy Communion or any of the means of grace at church, be intent upon this object. Nor is this all; for have I yet told you anything of the immense benefit it is in your power to do people of abandoned lives, by inviting them in a

* v. 16.

friendly way to accompany you to some church where you have yourself often received edification? Or, the good you can do them by proposing that they should occasionally go with you and hear an instructive preacher? Or, the good you can do them by urging them to read occasionally some pious book? Have I yet said a word about that supreme means of usefulness—your good example—which you can every day set before them? “Our actions,” St. Bernard assures us, “speak more effectually than our words.” Oh! that you understood the far more persuasive eloquence that is to be found in the speech of the daily life than in the speech of the tongue! Here is that commanding tone which the Apostle required in his Titus: “Speak with all authority.”* Doubtless the speech of the tongue has the power to excite, to win, to allure the mind; but ’tis the speech of the daily life that puts a constraint upon us. Therefore, although we grant you no permission to ascend the pulpit and to preach, what does this matter? Preach with your good example. Let it be your habit to behave reverently at church, that by this means the people chattering close to you may be reprov’d. Go to confession frequently. Often receive Holy Communion; and, as a general rule, never feel ashamed of your religion, nor bury it, as it were, under ground, from the observation of men. “Let thy fountains be conveyed abroad, and in the streets divide thy waters.”† The good done by you in secret, benefits yourselves alone; what good you do in public benefits others also: for hence it cometh, as St. Peter declares, that even “without the word they are won, beholding your conversation.”‡ Such being the fact, lose no fur-

* II. 15

† Prov. v. 16.

‡ 1 St. Pet. ii. 1, 2.

ther time, my most dearly beloved. At once begin to pay off a part, at least, of those long-standing arrears which are due to Christ for the souls you have taken from him. Apply to this business your whole mind, your full strength; and be assured that this is the best of all ways to recover his favor. For, if St. Bonaventure recorded of St. Francis of Assisi, that "he would in no wise regard himself as being a friend to Christ, unless he cherished the souls for which Christ died," what must we, poor wretches, then say of ourselves, who are doing him every day some injury, and yet hold ourselves not at all obliged to make him the slightest reparation?

THE SECOND PART.

8. I cannot but think it clearly proved that no person whatever, though independent or layman, has any right to consider himself exempted from the obligation of doing something, somehow, for the salvation of souls. But in this case, what becomes of you, ye prelates, parish priests, and regular clergy? Are you to consider yourselves the only persons in the world discharged from so weighty an obligation? Permit me rather, with all reverent freedom, to remind you of the special interest you have in this inquiry; because, as it bears upon you, the neglect of other men's souls is nothing else than the loss of your own.

Any person who stands surety for another is unquestionably bound so far by his promise that, should the principal fail, he must make a full amends and satisfaction for him, according to the strict tenor of the engagement. But tell me, when you undertook an office in the church, whether on a larger or less scale, was not this the very thing you then did? You engaged yourself, as surety for other men's souls; you bound yourself under an obligation to Christ.

that you would exert your utmost to make them render Him His due honor ; so that, on their failing in this respect, you, as being their surety, must be summoned to appear for them, and have to suffer the penalty and sustain the loss. Give heed, therefore, to the salutary admonition of the Holy Ghost: " My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, thou hast engaged fast thy hand to a stranger. Thou art ensnared with the words of thy mouth, and caught with thy own words. Do this then, my son, and deliver thyself."* St. Gregory the Great, Hugo, Bede, St. Bernard, but, more expressly than all of these, the Angelical Doctor, St. Thomas, apply these words of Solomon to all persons having the cure of souls: they tell us that the persons meant here are they who pledged both their *hand* and their *mouth* for the benefit of souls—their *hand*, by the example of a good life; their *mouth*, by the exercise of the divine office of preaching. But, suffer me to enquire of you, to whom did *they* thus engage themselves? Was it not to Christ? to their Saviour? to their Lord? Why, then, is it here said, *to a stranger?*—*If thou hast engaged fast thy hand to a stranger.* The difficulty has been ingeniously explained. I don't know whether you have ever been called upon to seek an interview with a person of rank, and to offer yourself as the surety for some one deeply in his debt. You cannot have failed to notice the joyous smile with which he receives you on his knowing the object of your visit; how he welcomes you with open arms and the warmest cordiality, as if he were entirely at your service. But, no sooner does the time come for your settling with him—oh! what an altered man you find him! He at once serves you with a peremptory notice that you must stand to your engagement. He

* Prov. vi. 1-3.

will not hear of arbitration; he will not hear of postponement; and, just as if he never knew you, he has you summoned, imprisoned, and your goods distrained, to enable you to satisfy his demands. Now, it is precisely the same in regard to Christ. He has the air of a *friend* when he accepts our security, but of a *stranger* when he calls us to account. Such is the beautiful explanation given by St. Thomas: "Christ is said to be a *stranger*; because, though a *friend* in taking our pledge, he will be a *stranger* in demanding its fulfilment: yes, he will be a stranger in demanding its fulfilment."

O ye ecclesiastics! devoted sometimes to your own interests beyond what is right and proper, you hasten in high glee to engage for others; you desire cure of souls; you get into places of trust; you eagerly compete with each other in the race for church preferment. God seems thus far to smile upon you; He is most ready courteously to accept every fine promise you make Him. He is a *friend* to you in taking your surety. But how think you? that He must needs be a friend when you come to settle your account? Sadly, sadly do you deceive yourself. Then He will be a *stranger* to you. Alas! He will then be all sternness, and hardly condescending to look upon you; he will insist on satisfaction; He will insist on his rights; He will insist upon all His due being paid, even to the uttermost farthing. "He will be a *stranger* in demanding its fulfilment."

And surely, were it otherwise, how can we suppose that, at the mere mention of a cure of souls, so many persons, distinguished for their piety, should have fled in horror to the wild woods for concealment? Nay, how many had recourse to expedients still more remarkable! The people of Hieropolis were assembled in order to snatch Ni-

lamon from the cloister and place him on the episcopal throne; when he, being no longer able to resist the urgency of the priests and the commands of the bishops, who had even assembled for his consecration, finally demanded a day to prepare himself for so tremendous a duty. It having been attained, he shut himself up in his cell; and, prostrate in prayer, what did he do? He sighed, wept, and prayed so intensely that at last he died before the evening of the day granted him. So much did he prefer a coffin to a throne. The anchorite Ammon cut off his ear to incapacitate himself for the see of Alexandria; and St. Ephrem pretended insanity in the sight of all men in order to avoid being bishop of Cæsarea. Witness that repugnance which St. Ambrose evinced in this matter. On his becoming acquainted with the intention of the Milanese to raise him from a secular consulship to a high position in the church, he caused a lofty tribunal to be instantly erected in the public square of the city. There he took his place frowning, and summoned sternly into his presence a set of executioners, some bringing their rods; some, their axes; some, their handcuffs: and then, that he might obtain a character for cruelty, he ordered the convicts to be brought out of their prisons, and, according to their several crimes, some to be exposed to torture, some to be handed over to death. This device, however, not succeeding, he returned to his palace, and had a number of idle and abandoned women openly invited to come to him, thereby to breed a suspicion of his habitually keeping such bad company. Unable, after all, to deceive the people by these pretences, he disguised himself in the dress of a common peasant, effected his escape in the night, and crossed the Alps on foot, in search of some friendly refuge among the rocks and caves of the mountains. But all was still to no pur-

pose, God thwarting him in every attempt which he made to escape. Can you now suppose, dear sirs, that men, so eminently gifted and qualified to undertake the charge of souls, would have been at this mighty pains to evade the obligation were it not an obligation dreadful—I say not to mortals, but to the very angels?

The case now forsooth is reversed. Now we have people who regard the charge of souls as a pleasant pastime, an easy life, a profitable speculation; ay, there are now some to be found, like that noble and spiritually-minded pastor, over the door of whose parsonage, surrounded as it was by the most enchanting scenery, I read these words, inscribed in very conspicuous letters: *Deus nobis hæc otia fecit!* “God has provided for me this place of repose!” Oh! how terrible is this! The angels, we all know, are endowed with most excellent gifts, the deepest sagacity, the loftiest wisdom; and yet to each angel but a single soul is given in charge—to each, one single soul! For many, many souls is a parish priest or a bishop responsible! And can he expect to fulfil his duty with so little trouble? Ah! be this never said of you! Expanding rather the flame of holy zeal, which, I am persuaded, now burns within you, act, all of you, upon the advice of Solomon, given in connection with the passage I have just quoted: “Do, therefore, my son, what I say, and deliver thyself; because thou art fallen into the hand of thy neighbor. Run about, make haste, stir up thy friend; give not sleep to thy eyes, neither let thy eyelids slumber: deliver thyself as a doe from the hand, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler.”* The advice may be summed up as follows: You are become surety to Christ, in behalf of his numerous debtors.

* Prov. vi. 3-5.

Lose no time, then ; be quick : see well to it that **every** individual of them pays. *Deliver thyself.* Pray, preach, warn, threaten, punish. Allow yourself no rest until God shall have recovered his due honor ; until abuses shall have ceased, until animosities shall be rooted up, until impure lusts shall be mortified ; above all, until the rising generation be well grounded in Christian doctrine ; until, as far as in you lies, a holy worship be fully restored to our churches, a modest demeanor to our clergy, a sound discipline to our laity. Do you not observe how the wild goats will struggle to extricate themselves from the snare of the hunter ? Be not at less pains to clear yourselves of your immense liabilities. "Do this, my son, and deliver thyself. Escape, as the doe ; escape, as the bird." For a tremendous issue, you see, is here at stake. It is your security. "Be not surety above thy power ; and, if thou be surety, think, as if thou wert to pay it." *

• Eccles. viii. 26.

SERMON VI.

ON THE CURE OF SLANDER.

"Why do Thy disciples transgress the tradition of the ancients? For they wash not their hands when they eat bread."—ST. MATT. XV. 2.

1. WERE it ever true that from the very same flowers from which bees would extract the sweetest honey spiders will extract poison of the most pernicious and deadly quality, that fact receives this day a clear illustration in the conduct of the holy Apostles. These poor creatures had left all to follow CHRIST; hence, living in extreme mortification and debasement, they had not a thought about their own interests nor the appearance they made in the world. Who, then, could have believed that even on this particular an accusation should be raised against them? It was observed (mark their enormous wickedness!)—what shall I say? that they had tasted unclean food, or that they had touched a putrifying dead body? No; the height of their offending was this—that they merely omitted now and then scrupulously to wash their hands before they ate. "They wash not their hands when they eat bread." And whereas, in a set of poor fishermen this might naturally be accounted for by their simplicity of character, it was denounced as being a slight put upon ordinances, a contempt of tradition; so true is it that from every medicinal herb the malice of mankind knows how to extract poison. And what is this, my dear Christians, but the **very malice** which is now so rampant among ourselves;

that which, clinging like the plague to every part of the city, goes creeping through our houses, through our public offices, and—would to God it were not so!—sometimes penetrates into our cloisters, however fenced on high to exclude it? If a man is humble, and therefore bears every ill-treatment patiently, they say he is a coward; if he is frugal, they say he is a miser; if religious, they say he is a hypocrite; if modest, they say he is a clown; and in this manner they gather abundant material for evil-speaking from every sort of character; as if this would redound not a little to their own credit; as if the only way to raise one's self were by depressing others; the only way to shine in the world were by obscuring the character of our neighbor. And is not all this, my hearers, something exceedingly cowardly? We ought to study to become perfect ourselves, not to make other people appear imperfect. Therefore, with your good pleasure, let me this morning do my utmost to curb these tongues that are so free and loquacious in the midst of us, and to impose on our evil speakers some degree of modesty and reserve. And with this view, we will commend to their adoption that excellent rule David prescribed to himself when he said, "That my mouth may not speak the works of men."* What are, strictly speaking, *the works of men*? Their virtues? By no means. Their vices? Yes; because their virtues they derive from God. Let those, therefore, who take a pleasure in constantly talking about other people's doings act upon this maxim. Let them speak of that which men derive from God; let them pass over in silence that which men only derive from themselves. Hence it will follow that from being evil speakers they will become eulogists. I

* Ps. xvi. 4.

fear, however, that their wrath will be fiercely excited against me when they hear me lashing their wickedness. I fear that, in all probability, they will make me smart for my pains, by heaping all manner of abuse upon a sermon so grating to their feelings. In spite of this, I have no wish to decline what is my duty; and, provided no one else has to suffer from their slander, I am quite willing to let them rage against me to their hearts' content; for, in truth, there is no reproach I do not justly deserve.

2. To begin—here indeed is a fine feather in your caps, ye slanderers, that you so wantonly assail a person who, being at a distance, is unable to hear your charges against him, and therefore can neither vindicate his conduct on the one hand, nor silence your noisy tongue on the other. In the Book of Leviticus, God formerly made a certain prohibition which may seem to you but of little importance; but to me, as now personally concerned in it, one of the highest importance and consideration. That prohibition was that no Israelite should dare to say anything evil of the deaf. "Thou shalt not speak evil of the deaf."* But how is this? Are the deaf so peculiarly privileged a class above their suffering brethren that, while every imaginable bad language may be uttered against the blind, the maimed, the deformed, and the stammering, nothing of the kind must be said in their single case alone? Certainly not; for we know full well that our charity must be universal. "Charity covereth all sins."† Still, if we are to believe commentators on Scripture, it was the will of God that more care should be taken of the deaf, inasmuch as to attack a person prevented for this reason from exculpating and defending himself, would seem to be the excess of

* Leviticus xix. 14. †

† Prov. x. 22.

cruelty. But tell me, ye slanderers, is not this the very thing you are doing? *To speak evil of the deaf* is, according to the moral sense put on the words by St. Gregory, "to defame the absent man who does not hear." You retire to your favorite club; there, without any check upon you, you censure the behavior of one who does not hear you; and don't you see that by such conduct you not only evince the utmost audacity, but commit a most unfeeling act of injustice. Think you, then, were the man present against whom you sharpen your teeth, you would dare speak of him in this iniquitous manner? Forgive me, if my words are too severe; I tell you plainly that in smiting your adversary thus behind his back you act like traitors. "When I was gone from them," said Job, "they spoke against me."* If he has any faults about him, such as so mightily offend you, go boldly, confront him face to face, as Nathan did David, as Ahias did Jeroboam, as Micheas did Achab. Set before him the evil of his doings; warn him, reprove him, rebuke him; for in acting thus you will greatly please God. But so long as you blame him, then only, when he is absent, in what apparent respect do you differ from those cowardly mastiffs who bark at the wolf when he is far beyond hearing, got away with the lamb between his tusks, already sheltered in the forest and safe concealed in the cave?

Would to God, however, that you would take a lesson from these mastiffs! It is quite true that they are silent when the wolf is near them; they are *dumb* dogs, as Isaias calls them—*dumb* dogs, "not able to bark."† Yet it by no means follows that they approve of the wolf's plundering habits, that they caress him, that they flatter him; and still

* Job xix. 28.

† Isaias lvi. 10.

less does it follow that they assist him to worry and mangle the flock. But after you have been cruelly slandering some person when absent, either in his public or private character—it may be for his keeping up a questionable connection, or for his love of play, or for his extravagance, or for his totally neglecting his business—how often and often, when he is present, do you flatter him on account of those very identical irregularities for which just before you so unmercifully blamed him! You praise him for his incontinence, as being the outbreak of a manly spirit; for his love of play, as being a nice recreation; for his extravagance, as living in good style; and you scruple not to recommend him to divert his mind more frequently from the cares of business, the neglect of which you are ready on the very next occasion spitefully to lay to his charge. And is not this to do to your neighbor an evident wrong?

I am well aware what vast courage it requires to go and admonish any person face to face as to his faults, especially if he is a man of high rank. To do this, one must needs be a second Elias, entirely lifted above the world, satisfied with a rough skin about his loins, and glad to make his dinner off the hard bread, the raven's gift, at the torrent's side. But if you have no heart for this, cease, at all events, from tearing in pieces in their absence those whom, when present, you dare not even prick with a pin. Because, as St. Jerome observed, "Truth does not like to lodge in holes and corners"; and conduct such as this on your part savors of the mole and the rat, who can indeed bite, but only in secret; or it rather resembles what Ecclesiastes asserted of certain diminutive snakes, which, bent on mischief, squat down in the sand—not a hiss, not a rustling movement from them to be heard—and then lurk for the wayfaring man, to take him off his guard and dart at his heels. "If a ser

pent bite in silence, he is nothing better than backbiteth secretly." *

And have you any encouragement to hope that you will find it an easy matter to restore to your neighbor the good character of which you have once deprived him? I would have you try the experiment with your utmost industry and all your might; and, oh! how difficult, after all, will you find the attempt! Moses was anxious to convince Pharaoh that he was a true servant of the Lord. Accordingly, how did he set about it? He held a rod in his hand; he cast it to the ground, and had it suddenly transformed into a horrid serpent. What then? No sooner did he take it again in his hand, than he had it, from being a serpent, restored back to a rod. The magicians of Egypt would fain give a like proof of their power. But in this they failed; for, although they could well change their rods into serpents, yet those serpents would continue serpents still, and never, from being serpents, would come back rods. † Now, have you paid attention to this? Origen grounds a very shrewd remark on it: "Behold to what extent demoniacal influence could here prevail. It could make evil out of good; but it could not remake good out of evil. It was able out of the rod to form the serpent, but it was unable out of the serpent to recover the rod." Now, conceive an effect similar to this resulting from your own conduct. You may succeed by a mere trifle in making that man, who has a name for uprightness, look like a most horrible, huge serpent; but what will you do in order to reinvest him afterwards with his former good character? You will find it easy to make that man, who is reputed modest, look like a libertine; but by what process, after he has once looked like a

* Ecclesiastes x. 21.

† Ex. vii. 20, 22.

libertine, will you make him reappear as a modest man? It will be easy for you to make that man, who has the credit of being religious, look like a hypocrite; but by what process, after he has once looked like a hypocrite, will you make him reappear as a religious man? The ill we hear of our neighbors is readily believed; it is swallowed with open ears; but, when we come to retract our words, oh! the difficulty there is in getting any to give us credit, at least without some reserve! "Slander away, slander away," said that infamous politician; "this is sure to answer your end; some of it cannot help sticking." The serpent will remain a serpent still. Who, then, does not clearly see how impossible it is completely to repair in this respect the damage we do our neighbor? We cannot say here, as we do in money matters, "If I have wronged any man of anything, I restore him fourfold."* What, then, is the true method of avoiding all such difficulties? Not to blame, but to be silent. "May my mouth not speak the works of men!"

3. But thus far I have only told you of one of the lesser bad effects of this sin; I mean the grievance inflicted on the person whose character you traduce—a grievance, after all, not infecting his soul, but only his worldly reputation; a thing valuable in its way, but very precarious. The greatest mischief is this—the stumbling-block you are placing in the direct path of those in whose presence you utter your slanders; one that may even hurry them on to perdition. Pray, give me here your close attention. The persons in whose hearing you use such language are either wicked or they are good. You must grant me this. Well, shall we suppose them to be wicked? Oh! what a

* St. Luke xix. 8.

rich treat will it be for them to know, from what you say, that they have many to keep them company in their evil courses! Oh! what immense comfort they will derive from this! Oh! what fresh spirits! Oh! what fresh daring! And, what may be even worse than all, oh! the unmeasured abuse they will heap upon those whose mis-carriages they hear you narrating? No sooner was David told of the dreadful end of the wretched Saul, left with his three valiant sons a cold corpse on the heights of Gelboe, than he entreated the bearer of the fatal intelligence, if he had any pity for his soul, not to mention the circumstance to the inhabitants of Geth nor to the people of Ascalon. He was loath to give the uncircumcised any occasion to glory in the calamities of Israel. "Tell it not in Geth, publish it not in the streets of Ascalon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph." * But how are you acting? Ah! ye slanderers, how, I say, are you acting, when you retire to that coterie of yours, for the purpose of recounting in such fine terms the bad conduct of that prelate, the frailty of that priest, the superciliousness of that recluse? Are you not giving the uncircumcised the occasion of a still more ungodly triumph? The inhabitants of Geth would have rejoiced; the people of Ascalon would have rejoiced—no doubt they would; but for what? For a mere mishap. Your hearers will make merry at a sin! And, oh! how often do we see that, in consequence of the reported misbehavior of one single individual, people will make up their minds to condemn the whole order! Here a man stands up and affirms that they must be put down; and here another replies that they ought to be got rid of; and

* 1 Kings i. 26.

here a third party, by way of rejoinder, will have them destroyed root and branch; and some now are even emboldened to utter blasphemies against Heaven, and to impeach the laws of the Almighty. Your own experience has full well led you to observe that no tiresome tree-hopper, in the summer months, as he sits chirping at his ease near the high-road, will so effectually provoke his comrades to join him in heightening the stunning effect of the noise he makes as will a single slanderer excite in all about him a like intolerable faculty of speaking evil. But how is it possible, all this time, that you feel no scruple to burden your consciences with the accumulated heavy weight of all the sins, to which you thus furnish the occasion!

4. If, on the other hand, they with whom you converse are all good people, and consequently feel rather disgusted than disposed to rejoice at the shameful things you mention in their presence, do you therefore encourage the notion that you are not exposing them to a corresponding danger of sinning, just as before in the case of the wicked? In this you deceive, you grossly deceive yourselves; because hereby they may be introduced to the knowledge of much evil, such as before never occurred to their minds; in addition to this, when they hear you blaming others for faults from which they know themselves to be free, it is highly probable they will be immediately led to applaud themselves, and, like the Pharisee, to indulge in some silly notions of self-complacency and conceit, pride and presumption, as if they were *not as other men are*. It will be easy for them to hold more or less in contempt the persons you are blaming. It will be easy for them to cool towards such persons, if before they thought well of them. It will be easy for them to keep aloof from them, if before they gave them their confidence; and, should no other result

follow, it is too likely that they will hastily believe charges they hear alleged, without having first candidly heard both sides of the question, and thus they will do an evident wrong to the charity of Christians. And this is the very thing which David had in his mind when he said: "Sitting, thou didst speak against thy brother, and didst lay a scandal against thy mother's son."* Thou didst it *sitting*, he says, intimating that there was no hurry about it, nor mere accident, nor only a few words said; but that thou didst leisurely compose thyself to defame thy neighbor; *sitting* in the ante-room of that prince you wait upon; *sitting* on the marble benches of that piazza; *sitting* at the front door of that shop; *sitting* on the chairs of that particular church, while waiting for the preacher; *sitting* round that fire; *sitting* at the dinner-table; *sitting* at that evening party; *sitting* in that carriage; *sitting*, in short, as expressive of the rare satisfaction and huge delight you had in what you were doing—"sitting, thou didst speak against thy brother." What then? And thinkest thou that the mischief, all of it, therefore ended here? Not so, thou slanderous man, not so; for *thou didst*, at the same time, *lay a scandal against thy mother's son!* Hast thou forgotten who they were that heard thy words? Those weak and tender ones—*thy mother's sons* (for precisely so St. Augustine expounds it)—they, by reason of thee, stumbled; they, by reason of thee, fell; they, by reason of thee, were betrayed into sin—some more, some less. For "when good men, who seem to be of some weight and influence, are evil spoken of, the weak, who as yet know not how to judge, fall upon the stumbling-block." And dost thou not fear and tremble for thyself? Dost thou "drink in iniquity"—not simply thine own, but

* Ps. xlix. 20.

other men's too—like so much water? Take my advice; adopt the rule I prescribe to you—"That my tongue may not speak the words of men!"

5. But more remains to be said. For the slanderer's tongue, you must know, is the tongue of a viper; that is, it has three forks and three furrows; and by the help of these, as St. Bernard observes, it inflicts at the same time three distinct wounds. It wounds the person whom we slander, as we said at first; it wounds those in whose hearing we slander, since it places a positive stumbling-block in their path; and, lastly, it wounds the slanderer himself, since it harms him in a way which it now remains for me, at some greater length, to explain. But, oh! that I could command such passionate expressions of sorrow as adequately to represent before you the nature of that harm, and thus affect you with some sense of the incalculable wrongs you are doing yourselves by this wanton use of your speech! First, therefore, be assured of this, though it be a less matter: that while you are reckoning on gaining popularity and favor in society, thanks to that greediness with which scandal is generally listened to, you are, instead of this, getting yourselves most thoroughly hated. At once it will be seen what Solomon declared: "The detractor is the abomination of men."* For only tell me this: Do you regard the persons with whom you are conversing to be such arrant fools as never once to conclude among themselves that as in their company you censure *others*, exactly so in the company of others you will censure *them*? They see this—oh! yes, they see it plainly enough; and, notwithstanding the applauding smiles they lavish upon you, yet secretly within themselves, "Only just fall," they say,

• Prov. xxiv. 9.

“under the beak of this vulture, and then save your feathers, if you can! Oh! the incision! Oh! the deep gashes he makes! Oh! how quickly he draws blood, wherever he fixes his talons!” “There is a generation”—’tis thus strongly expressed in the Proverbs—“there is a generation that for teeth hath swords.”*

Nor will it avail you anything to smooth and gild over your slanders by cleverly interlarding them with a certain amount of commendation, thereby to acquire more credit to yourself for sincerity, and thus to blame on a large scale, while you praise on a narrow one. This indeed is a trick quite antiquated and threadbare; and it would really be a wonder, at this time of day, to find any one ignorant of the fact that the Thyrsus-staff did not cut a jot less severely because it happened to be enfolded in the verdant leaf of the vine. What was the plan pursued by those men of Israel, when, on their return from spying out the Promised Land, they sought to degrade it in the opinion of the people who had sent them there? They began with first highly commending it. Accordingly, producing a cluster of grapes of such enormous size as to require two men to carry it on a pole, and exhibiting some most beautiful pomegranates, and displaying to the public view some figs of the finest quality, “Behold,” they exclaimed, “behold what is the rich produce of this land, whither God is conducting us! Of a truth, milk and honey are as common in it as water. It literally does flow *with milk and honey*.† Oh! what verdant pastures are there! Oh! what charming uplands! Oh! what bright, transparent fountains! A more enchanting region you will not find upon the face of the whole earth.” But what came next? Upon these lus-

* Proverbs xxx. 24.

† Numbers xiii. 23.

cious, honeyed expressions, with which they prefaced their report, they soon after poured such a flood of wormwood—by describing its inhabitants as being a race of giants, its cities as being impregnable, its climate as being pestilential—that all who heard them became utterly disgusted at the idea of going there; and, in consequence of this, they rose up against Moses and Aaron, and even God Himself, in so fierce a mutiny that nothing like it was ever before witnessed in their tents. You see, therefore, this device of yours to blame on a large scale, while you praise on a narrow one, is not quite so new as you supposed, but, on the contrary, is become quite stale and mouldy; and, if it is so, what is there to prevent your becoming a less object of hatred? People perfectly well understand that it is not honest zeal which prompts you to blacken so unmercifully the conduct of your neighbor. No; it is a bad mind; it is spite; it is malice under a partial show of zeal; hence the persons who form your audience cannot but dread you as they would dread those formidable dogs in the shambles, who delight in begriming their fangs indiscriminately in every kind of blood; and, when they thus dread you, they must have you in perfect abhorrence. “The detractor is the abomination of men.”

6. But come, we will imagine—what indeed can never happen—that this saying of the wise man has no reference to your case, and that, instead of making yourselves hated in the world by your slanders, you should rather by such means become popular and a favorite. But don't you know very well that, under all circumstances, you are rendering yourself most hateful to God? “Detractors, hateful to God” *—so wrote the apostle. And no wonder God

* Rom. i. 30.

should hate them ; for this is a kind of vice **which is most** directly opposite to the mind of God. And what, asks St. Thomas, is the mind of God ? It is most indulgent, most condescending. Oh ! the reluctance He has, so long as we are alive, to expose our failings ! “ It goes very hard **against** Him to publish our hidden faults ” ; for He has no wish to place us in a worse condition than that of our artists, who would certainly feel sorely aggrieved were you to draw aside the curtain in their studios until such time as they had put the finishing touch to their pictures, and were even still at liberty to apply the sponge to any place on the canvas they liked, in token of some dissatisfaction with the painting. He beheld once that prodigal son of His approaching Him, who, benumbed with cold and wasted with hunger, could with difficulty scarce keep life in his body ; yet, though he observed him in this plight, what, in the first instance, was he careful to do for him ? Was it to make him warm ? Was it to give him food ? Not so, my hearers. His first concern was to clothe him : “ Bring forth quickly the first robe.” * And, while they were bringing it, He kept him so closely enfolded in his embrace that none of the servants near, as St. Peter Chrysologus remarks, could see his state of nudity, or turn it into ridicule. “ He would have him clothed first and fed afterwards.” Thus He veiled the adulteress brought before him in the temple, not uttering a word of reproach against her until every one of her accusers had left the place. Thus He veiled the woman of Samaria who overtook Him at the well, not charging her with her incontinency before every one of His disciples had quitted the spot. Thus He **veiled** the very traitor Judas himself, importuned **as** He

* St. Luke xv. 22.

was by John—by John, His beloved, His favorite, the treasurer of all His chief secrets—yet, notwithstanding this, He would not make a disclosure even to John, unless in ambiguous terms. So invariably true is it that “it goes very hard against Him to publish our hidden faults.”

On what ground, therefore, ye slanderers, can you ever expect God will not hate you, when, in downright opposition to Him, you are constantly going about exposing your neighbor's most secret, most bosom, most treasured-up delinquencies; when, more barefaced than Cham of old, you scruple nothing to uncover the nakedness of a man, lying, as it were, asleep, and even to invite others with you to this spectacle? Yes, God does, He does indeed hate you; there can be no doubt of it. For I will ask you this: Do you ascribe it to any goodness in yourselves that you are not so great sinners as this your brother is? All comes of the grace of God. All is His work. All is His merit. And is it on account of this that you bear malice against any? Is it for this that you bite him? Is it for this that you wrong him? From such extreme pride, what else have you to expect than that God should forthwith deprive you of the support of His grace, and, by a just judgment, leave you to plunge into the same excesses which you have so cruelly laid at your neighbor's door, however flagrant, however monstrous they may be? Hear what He declares to us in the Proverbs: “The wicked confoundeth, and shall be confounded.”* Yes, dear sirs, the wicked man puts others to shame, and shall be put to shame himself. I only wish I had time to expatiate on this proverb, and to show you in what manner every age, every people, and every station in life has constantly attested its truth.

* Prov. xiii. 5.

But let the history of Absalom for the present answer for them all—a history quite incredible, were it not a matter of faith among us. This man, when he heard of the brutal violence which Amnon, his elder brother, had in his cruel lust used towards Thamar, fell into such a rage, and took it so much to heart, that nothing short of the blood of the vile ravisher was, he conceived, sufficient to wipe away the stain of so foul a disgrace. Hereupon what does he? For a long time he dissembled his knowledge of what had happened, till at last, when, as we say, the pear was ripe, he invited Amnon and all his royal brothers to a magnificent banquet; and there, having commanded his servants to fall upon him, he did not so much murder as mangle him to pieces.* Now, who would not have felt certain after this that Absalom would for the future be extremely careful never himself to contract in the eyes of the world the slightest taint of that filthiness which, as seen in another, had caused him such infinite disgust? “For,” as the wise man says, “whosoever speaketh ill of anything, bindeth himself for the time to come.”† And would you not, therefore, maintain that so tremendous a vindicator of the rights of chastity ought in his own life to be more innocent than a lamb and of purer white than an ermine? But now prepare to be astounded and shocked indeed. This Absalom went so far greater lengths in the very same sin he had so detested in Amnon that, when his father fled from the palace and left every room there at his disposal, with a shamelessness beyond what is known among savages, nor even universal among brute beasts, “he spread a tent upon the top of the house, and went in to his father’s concubines before all Israel.”‡ And is this, then, your Absalom,

* 2 Kings xiii. 26.

† Prov. xiii. 23.

‡ 2 Kings xvi. 25.

that zealot for purity, who, on merely hearing of a single act of incest, raised such an outcry? Was ever man so altered? What a marvellous, unheard-of thing! The sin of Amnon was unquestionably great; but, then, he committed it by stealth, secretly, in a most secluded part of the house, whither, from a deeper sense of modesty, on his pretended sickness, he had retired. Whereas Absalom scruples not to commit his sin before an assembled multitude, at the sound of the trumpet, at the call of the crier, ay—the most horrible thing above all—“in the sight of the very sun!” And my wonder is why the sun did not then wheel back its chariot, and so decline bearing any part in so monstrous an obscenity. You may account for this sin as you please: my own opinion is that Absalom fell into it because for one of the same kind he had raised such an outcry against Amnon. “The wicked confoundeth and shall be confounded.” To his own brother he had shown no pity; his mind rather was, by a public infliction of revenge, to degrade him and put him to shame; and therefore God suffered him soon after to commit a sin such as far exceeded the sin of his brother.

Let us apply this to our subject. You lash your neighbor in such unsparing terms for some infirmity to which he has yielded, for some sensual indulgence, some passionate outbreak, some intemperance, some vanity, some inconsistency; and have you no fear that God may suffer you, as a judgment, to fall yourself into some still greater offences? I leave you to judge of this; I would only beg you, with all deference and submission, not to have for the time to come such unbounded confidence in yourselves. “Reprove thy friend, reprove thy neighbor”—well and good; but attend to the advice of the preacher just after: “and

give place to the fear of the Most High"; * because, perfect as you may now appear to yourselves to be, you cannot tell from this how you may behave at some future time. Who would have thought that Jehu, the King of Israel, who once demolished the altar of Baal and exterminated his priests with such flaming zeal, would one day come to fall down and worship idols? † Who would have thought that Joas, the King of Juda, who had restored the walls of the temple and replenished its treasury with such exemplary piety, would one day come with profane hands to plunder it? ‡ Who would have thought that Solomon—ay, the same Solomon who, in his Proverbs, had written so forcibly against the love of women—should fall himself into that deep pit, against which he had so plainly cautioned others? § Do not be carried away with any hasty notions of your being under no danger of sinning; for, in my judgment, you are not yet well established in grace; you are still liable to fall; you are still frail creatures; and God grant you may never come to behave worse than the persons whom you slander! Alas! so it is, so it is. They who, like frogs in the mire, lie buried in their habitual sins are the loudest of all clamorers and croakers, as if they would cast on the passer-by the reproach of their own uncleanness. The wise man assures us that the good are always most inclined to believe well of all. "The innocent believeth every word." || Thus Josue believed well of the Gabaonites, Jacob of Laban, Jonathan of Tryphon; ¶ whereas men of the worst and most abandoned character, as though not satisfied with the faults which they see in others, will often see in them faults which they really do not possess. They remark everything, they make a jest of

* Ecclus. xix. 13, 18.

§ 3 Kings xi.

† 2 Kings x.

| Prov. xiv. 15.

‡ 4 Kings xii.

¶ 1 Mach. xii. 46.

everything, and they will be persuaded of their neighbors nothing but the very worst. Hear the excellent words of the preacher: "The fool, when he walketh in the way, whereas he himself is a fool, esteemeth all men fools."* And is such arrogance as this to be tolerated in the sight of God? Of a sure certainty must it needs call down His castigation. For if, under the Law, He would not allow even the healthy to condemn any as being leprous, unless the disease were first certified by a long examination under the eye of the priest, how will he ever bear that the lepers should condemn the persons in health? "May my tongue not speak the works of men!" For to do this is to expose ourselves to a most terrible risk and danger. And here you will perhaps suppose me to have exhausted every possible argument, in order to strike a fear into evil speakers. But only pause for a few minutes, and you will see that what I have said thus far is, comparatively speaking, mere playing with my subject.

THE SECOND PART.

7. I by no means desire the reputation among you of being a gloomy preacher; for to what purpose should I be preaching every day sermons of melancholy tone or of portentous omen, as if I took a pleasure in frightening you, were you to avoid hearing them by making your escape out of church. At the same time, as I love you, I must take care not to deceive you. Be on your guard, ye slanderers; for the danger hanging over your heads is one most awful. You run the risk of meeting very soon a dreadful end. But how can I tell this? Has, then, an angel descended from heaven to entrust me with so profound a

* Eccl. i. 3.

secret? Have I received any light or illumination from above to this effect? I have, and even beyond what you intimate; inasmuch as, not an Angel, but the Lord of Angels, speaking to me in the Book of Proverbs, has assured me that the proper punishment of detractors is a sudden death: "My son, fear the Lord and the king, and have nothing to do with detractors; for their destruction shall rise suddenly." * *Suddenly*; yes, so it is written—*suddenly, suddenly!* Have you well marked the word? "Their destruction shall rise suddenly." Ah! the short-sighted creatures we are! Whence comes it that we sit so unconcerned in the face of such tremendous danger? Can God, then, lie? Can He exaggerate? Can He use the language of bravado to get Himself credited? I leave you to judge. But this tell me: What was the end appointed to that babbler of an Alcimus, who dared speak so wantonly against the noble Machabee Judas? He lost thereupon the power of speech, and, struck at the same time with dumbness and with horror, he died of a sudden attack of palsy.† What was the end of a Dathan? What was the end of a Core? What was the end of an Abiron?—those false revilers of Moses. Were not all three of them swallowed alive by the earth opening wide her jaws to receive them? And what was the end of the many others who also slandered the same Moses in the land of Edom? Answer me this. Cannot one among you recollect it? Why, all of them beheld troops of horned serpents, darting vipers, asps, and a thousand other such deadly creatures, suddenly attacking them on their rear, who, to all appearance, vomiting flames and hurling combustion upon them, in a very short time made of them an enormous havoc.‡ Hence I cannot consider God as

* Prov. xxiv. 91, 92.

† 1 Mach. ix. 55.

‡ Num. xxi. 6.

using the language of bravado to get Himself credited when He assures us that the death of the detractor shall be sudden—"their destruction shall rise suddenly"—this being a fact, not only authenticated by history, but one quite consonant with reason; because, if these evil speakers are a set of men who, as I said at first, smite their enemies behind the back, and never proceed against them openly, but always in a sly, underhand, treacherous manner, why, what is it if they find themselves seized much in the same way by the hand of death—the only thing in the world to put a final full stop to a wicked tongue?

8. Nevertheless (you see on what highly liberal terms I invariably wish to treat you) I am willing to allow that this threat will not, in your particular case, be carried out with such extreme rigor. Before you die, I grant you may have some convenient space for repentance, self-recollection, for prayer that your sins may be forgiven you. What then? With what trust, with what confidence, with what face will you apply to Christ for His mercy at your dying hour? Were not you those hard-hearted persons who would never once kindly overlook a single fault in your neighbor, whose rule it rather was always to degrade him in your insolence, to inveigh against him in your pride, and, far from showing him the least pity, to tear his character to pieces in every society you frequented? And can you, then, expect God will show you any remarkable forbearance? Alas! Believe me, this will be your greatest danger when you die—your entire loss of any comfortable reliance on the goodness of God. Nor is my apprehension unfounded; for God will then, somehow, in all His terrific indignation and fury, declare Himself to be against the slanderer, as if entering on His special office of the persecutor of all such, according to that expression in the Psalms: "The man

that in private detracted his neighbor, him did I persecute." *

You must all be well acquainted with the mighty influence Moses exerted over God in disposing Him to pardon sinners. His people Israel—the fact is notorious—had made a golden calf, burnt incense to it, and offered to it sacrifice. Whereupon, highly incensed, He determined to go forth in fire and fury against such a desperate set of rebels, and sweep them clean from the earth. And yet, would you believe what I say? Moses no sooner steps forward with a few appropriate words of prayer and intercession in their favor, than, without a single word to the contrary, he obtains their pardon, and causes God to subside into a calm far beyond that of the agitated waves when the wind and storm go down. "And the Lord was appeased from doing the evil which He had spoken against His people." † Now, who among you would not have concluded from this that the man who so easily could obtain the forgiveness of such an extremely wicked people need never afterwards fear being refused? Nevertheless, what happened? A short time after, Moses would intercede in behalf of his own sister Mary, smitten in her face with a most loathsome leprosy. Let him, however, entreat, let him press his suit to the utmost, he can prevail nothing. No; he must make up his mind to see her banished from society, excommunicated, and made to suffer for a prolonged season the penalty of her scandalous effrontery. But why so? Had she, then, committed some crime worse than idolatry? What had the poor creature done? What had she said? What had she attempted? We all know her particular offence. Abusing the loquacity with which na-

* Ps. c. 5.

† Ex. xxxii. 24.

ture has endowed the female sex, that they might thereby more easily second the first efforts of their children to speak, she had reflected injuriously upon her brother for his having married a certain woman, who, whether by the color of her skin or by her birth, I know not which, was suspected to be an Ethiopian. Now, because this was slander, implying a want of tenderness for the infirmities of another, God, as St. Basil remarks, refused to listen to any pleadings, any prayers, any importunities whatsoever employed in her favor; and although He was most ready at the intercession of Moses to pardon the most aggravated outrages against His own Divine person, yet here, where the offence was comparatively so trifling, and committed, too, against this very Moses himself, He would on no consideration give way.

See, then, whether my words are not true. This, my brethren, this is the appalling effect that slander produces on the mind of God; it is as if it rendered him callous, implacable, inexorable; and, therefore, it is quite certain that should you cherish any design of having recourse to Him in your last sickness, to get Him to pity you, you will fail altogether; and it will then appear to you an overstretch of boldness to ask him to compassionate in you those failings which sprang only from your own want of compassion towards others. Such was the reply made by a certain wretched friar, as it is related by some most creditable writers. He was on the point of death. The bystanders earnestly exhorted him to put his trust in the mercy of God. "What mercy?" he answered them, "what mercy? There is no mercy for me, who showed so little of it to others." He then put out his tongue, and, pointing with his fingers, bade them to look at it: "This tongue," he resumed, "it is that has ruined me! This very tongue, that

so often helped me in your hearing to condemn others, now itself hurls me desperately into perdition!" He spake, and, to make it more evident that he had pronounced a judicial sentence on himself, his tongue most frightfully began to swell in his mouth; so that, being unable to draw it in, he howled and bellowed like an ox under the cleaver. And so, after the most agonizing torture, he breathed his last. Another slanderer, a woman, when dying, most savagely with her own teeth rent her tongue into pieces; in another case, a man's tongue became palsied; in another, it bred worms; so unserviceable did it become to them at their last extremity in asking God to forgive them their past sins. But what can you say in reply to this? Does it appear prudent for you to expose yourself to such a terrible hazard for the sake of giving a little license to an unbridled tongue? "May my mouth not speak the works of men!" Make, then, make this declaration, I say: "May my mouth not speak the works of men!" For much indeed does it concern you to resolve on this, and to do so with firmness. How foolish! How blind! How besotted we are! Is it possible we can be so slow in determining, while here, to look to ourselves, considering that hereafter, before the tribunal of God, it will be of ourselves, and not of other people, that we must give an account? A mighty serious business, truly, for us to be at so great pains and anxiety about our neighbors' consciences, when this can only serve to heap fresh burdens upon our own! What advantage has the river, when, expanding wide from its brimming fountain-head, it sweeps along the banks, and, in its rapid murmuring course, carries away from them their dirt and rubbish, if by this it only stains itself and becomes begrimed with filthiness? Human life is not so protracted, would we only, as duty bids us, spend it wisely in seeking good to ourselves, as to

leave us an overplus of leisure to waste idly on the doings of others. "One thing is necessary,"* if we will believe Christ, and this *one thing* is the work—oh! how difficult, how painful!—of our own salvation. Yet, as though this were a mere nothing, we scruple not to lade ourselves with many needless anxieties, worse than needless, positively hurtful. Let us by all means leave it to these gad-ding Esaus, their quivers on their backs and their bow in hand, to spend the livelong day in chasing after the delinquencies of others. We, like Jacob, will be rather keepers at home, and in all godly simplicity will "esteem others better than ourselves." This is to act the part of a good Christian, of a wise and prudent man; but to act otherwise is a clear sign that we pay no regard to the salvation of our souls.

* St. Luke x. 42.

SERMON VII.

ON THE TRUTH OF CHRISTIANITY.

"And the multitude sought Him, and came unto Him, and they stayed Him, that He should not depart from them. To whom He said: I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also; for therefore am I sent."—ST. LUKE IV. 42, 43.

1. AMONG the many religions prevailing on the earth, unlike and even opposed to each other as they are, it is evident that one only of their number can possibly be true. No person can well doubt of this, unless he wishes to run counter to the insuperable force of that reason which presides over man, or to rebel against the dictates of conscience, implanted in us by nature. For while we acknowledge that there is, as may easily be demonstrated, but One God in the world—a God infinitely wise in knowing, good in designing, powerful in executing, everything requisite to the right government of the universe—how is it possible that from Him should ever originate, or that to Him should ever be acceptable, so many conflicting systems of religion, each of which in a rancorous rivalry denounces the other as being wicked, and false, and hateful to the very same Being whom they would all alike proudly claim as being their own Author? The whole difficulty of the case, therefore, lies in finding out which among these religions is the true one; thereby to detect those sophistical preachers who, under the mask of tender, innocent lambs, conceal the fangs of the devouring wolf.

But here, Christians, we may well congratulate one another ; for our lot is fallen, beyond that of others, upon a good ground ; nor is it from any blind, flattering self-love, but from the solid deductions of reason, that we give the exclusive preference to our religion ; not regarding it, however, to be good, because it is ours, but rather as being ours because it is good. And, oh ! that I were in the midst of some poor bewildered heathens, for the delight I should experience in convincing them by natural arguments that Christ is the true Messenger, who was sent into the world to announce the Kingdom of Heaven ; and, therefore, that we who receive Him, we who entertain Him, we who are at a strife among ourselves in beseeching Him, with the multitudes in to-day's Gospel, "that He should not depart from us," are not in this matter the deceived persons. No ; they are the deceived who will not even throw open their doors to admit Him. But why need I travel so far as to an infidel people for this ? Is it, in your opinion, quite superfluous to advert now and then among Christians to those discourses on the evidences of our religion which, though they cannot make our faith more certain, may at least preserve it to us in more life and activity ? Arguments grounded on natural reason resemble a flame, which warms faith, though it does not enable it to see ; and although faith does not primarily rest on any human evidence, but on the veracity of God, yet none ever forbade her the use of those arguments which are most calculated to convince her opponents 'that she has reason for believing what she does believe.

Would you not, then, like to hear me demonstrate a truth on rational grounds, as precious to us as it is certainly true in itself—namely, that the Law, given us by Christ, is the Law of God ? I really believe you would : for when-

ever I dwell on this subject myself, it fills me with exceeding consolation. At all such times I feel an ardent, longing desire in my soul to thank God for His wholly unmerited goodness in having caused me to be born in a land where such a law has fixed its dominion. Suppose, then, for this once, that you represent my opponents; and then, like a man engaged in a hard-fought combat, who is now on the attack, now on the defence, I shall have to devise how best I may clearly convince you of the vast advantages possessed by the Gospel over the absurdities so highly honored by other religionists. I said, I shall have to devise the means; for, you will observe, I cannot well, in a fight of this description, choose my own weapons. On the supposition that I am contending with one who pays no regard to the Scriptures nor to the Fathers, I must resign the use of my most effectual weapons. I cannot appeal to the Scriptures, at least in direct proof of my proposition, nor can I quote the Fathers; but, like Gedeon's soldiers, I must go forward with a lamp only in my hands; in other words, I must confine myself to the use of that light which nature has imparted to the minds of all.

2. Before, however, we come to close quarters, I desire you will grant me one single point, which is, indeed, so very fair and reasonable that, in the event of your refusing it me in the way of kindness, I will wrest it from you by main force. And what is it? Attend. You must grant that this Jesus, whom we Christians worship, was not the most wicked, the most reprobate, the most impious person who ever lived on the earth. Do you concede this point to me? It is a fact that even His worst enemies never entertained so bad an opinion of Him. On the contrary, many of the Gentiles considered Him to have been a most upright teacher and very excellent man. In this character He was

honored by Alexander, an idolatrous Emperor, with such distinguished praise, and, what is more, adored even with public sacrifices. But I do not require of you so much as this. I shall be quite satisfied by your admission that He was not the greatest sinner in the world. Do you, then, at least grant me this? Well, then, mark the conclusion I draw from it. Therefore Christ is God; therefore the faith He taught is true; therefore the law He gave is true; therefore, all of you, O ye Mahometans! O ye idolaters! O ye Jews! O ye inventors of new religions! bend your knees, bow down your heads, and one and all of you adore Christ! For since, as I have already proved, we can acknowledge the existence of one only God in the world, this God is Christ. Gently, gently, you will, however, reply; you seem to have a mind to shout a triumph before the battle is even fought, not to say before the victory is won. And was ever a conclusion more unwarranted? Christ is not the greatest sinner in the world; therefore Christ is God. Is there, then, no middle point between the extremes of goodness and wickedness? There is, I allow, a middle point, but none in regard to Christ. This is the assertion I have to make good in order to gain my point. I, therefore, beg you to listen attentively, especially as the arguments you will have to hear are of great weight and importance.

Did not Christ, then, by every possible contrivance always endeavor to be accounted God? Surely He was constantly aiming at this, and framing His discourses with this view. Whatever sublime truth He taught, whatever wondrous miracle He performed, whatever severe suffering He endured, all was mainly directed to this paramount object. He rewarded with the most illustrious distinctions the man who openly acknowledged Him to be God, as Peter did;

He reproved the man who expressed any hesitation upon the subject, as Thomas. He asserted His Divinity to the man who made enquiries concerning it, as Nathaniel did; and He gave Himself out in this character, both in public and in private, both by His words and works, so as to justify the particular accusation of His enemies, "Thou being a man, makest Thyself God." * What wickedness more excessive, more enormous, or more diabolical can there be than such a desire unjustly to usurp the Godhead? And mark well the way of His doing it. I am aware that in former times there were others also who aspired to a like preeminence, and who employed various artifices and strange devices with this end in view. Hanno the Carthaginian was at great pains in teaching crows, ravens, magpies, and other talking birds of this sort to pronounce these words, "Hanno is God"; and he then let them fly, that, as they travelled in different directions to different countries, they might carry with them the glory of his name. Tiberius, Domitian, Caligula, Diocletian, and other crowned monsters of Rome had either temples or altars, victims or sacrifices, consecrated to themselves. That renowned Salomoneus drove about the city in a splendid chariot, so constructed as to dart around it arrows of fire, and to imitate by some hidden machinery the flash of lightning and the rolling of thunder, that so he might induce the citizens to worship him as Jupiter. Thus Alexander the Macedonian; thus Tesimon the Cyprian; thus Sapor the Persian; thus Heraclitus the philosopher; thus Menecrates the physician; thus Manes the heresiarch; thus many others by the use of sundry divers expedients tried to gull the world into paying them adoration. Yet, after all, these persons

* St. John x. 33.

aimed at getting divine worship offered them by a single people or for a limited time; nor did they disdain to be associated with other strange gods. They were quite content—a known fact—that the Marses, the Mercurys, the Apollos, and the Saturns should go shares in being recognized as deities. Hence Caligula, notoriously proud, as he was, in other respects, used to take his place in the temple between the statues of Castor and Pollux, regarding himself as certainly being the greater god, but not therefore the only one. Christ alone would be worshipped as being the One, the universal God. “One is your Master, Christ.”* Accordingly, He has condemned every other religion but His own. He has denounced every other faith; He has prohibited every sacrifice, and publicly protested to this effect. “He that is not with Me is against Me.”† Nor did He demand the worship of a single age, but of all ages; nor of a single land, but of all lands. “Go ye into the whole world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.”‡ Can it, then, once be doubted that, unless He was the true God, He would have been the most wicked, ay, the most impious, man that was ever born in the universe?

But you have already granted this to be false. It remains, then, that Christ is the true God He declared Himself to be, and whom, as being the true God, we accordingly worship. It seems, then, my hearers, that I have now clearly proved what I undertook. My sermon, therefore, might here abruptly terminate, unless you were to play the part of the rudest and most desperate enemies Christ ever had, by retracting what you have conceded, and were daringly to assert (a blasphemy too dreadful to be uttered!)

* St. Matt. xxiii. 10.

† St. Matt. xii. 30.

‡ St. Mark xvi. 15.

that Christ *was* the greatest sinner the world ever saw. I will, however, for the sake of argument, suppose you capable of making this retraction; and now see whether I will not successfully contend for this point, too, and bear it in triumph from you, certainly for your edification, and, perhaps, even with your own consent.

3. Tell me, then, first, I beseech you, had Christ been so wicked a man as none surely ever supposed Him to be, how was it possible that no mention of any defect or vice in His character should ever have reached us up to this very hour? When He thus aimed at making Himself God, His pride, doubtless, must have been most exorbitant. Why, then, were no other sins, if not worse in character yet greater in number, found in Him to keep it company? For wickedness, we are certain, never goes alone: far less does pride, the mother and the nurse of all vices. "Pride is the beginning of sin, and he that hath it shall pour out abomination."* It gives birth to pomp, ostentation, and vain-glory. It brings with it the contempt of our inferiors, the oppression of our equals, the envy of our superiors. It prompts us passionately to seek revenge for every outrage, to be greedy in getting gain and grasping in keeping it, to be impatient in bearing evil and hasty in doing it; inso-much that, as Pacatus shrewdly remarked, when the Romans would express the extreme wickedness of their old tyrant Tarquinius, they decided upon calling him *Superbus*, the Proud. They considered such a stigma to include everything. How, then, do you account for the fact that not the slightest taint of any such vice was ever found in Christ, and that He was, on the contrary, always so respectful, so unassuming, so meek, so tolerant, so religious?

* Ecclus. x. 13.

Nor is it the Evangelists only who, suspected as they might be, from their connection with Him, of some partiality, give Him this high character. We have the same account from Philo and Josephus, both of them Jews, and even from Lentulus, that Roman president who, though a heathen, when writing to Rome expressly on this subject, described him as being something above human.

4. Again, are we not of one mind in extolling the purity of His doctrine? How, then, can you suspect the purity of His life? I fully grant that a wicked man may deliver many useful moral precepts; but, whether as blinded by passion, or carried too far by zeal, or allured by self-interest, he is sure to allow some sentiments to escape him, in an unguarded moment, savoring more of the corruption of the flesh than the severity of virtue. Accordingly, what teacher out of the Church can you produce who did not mix up with the salutary lessons he left behind him some most destructive errors? Did not Socrates, the reputed master of morality, permit in his laws the promiscuous interchange of wives; an example afterwards followed by Cato, the glory of Rome, and by Plato, the oracle of Greece? Did not Lycurgus allow the Spartans every act of theft, however mischievous, provided they could manage it cunningly and clandestinely? And did not Solon suffer the Athenians to indulge in every act of lewdness, however scandalous, provided they were in the rank of free men, and not slaves? Aristotle felt no scruple in establishing a law in his republic that, if in any family the number of the sons should once exceed its amount of income, mothers ought for the future to procure abortion; and that, instead of tenderly nursing any children who might chance to be born with some members or senses defective, who were blind, maimed, crippled, or contracted, they should expose

them as foundlings? And Seneca, the great moralist—with what fine lofty periods and rhetorical flourishes did he extol that cowardly precipitation which drives a man to commit suicide, because he has not patience to endure life under its afflictions! And likewise Tully, and Sallust, and Tacitus, and Pliny, and other vaunted prodigies of wisdom—how highly did they commend the persecution of enemies, the avenging one's self for affronts, the thirsting after renown, the setting our hearts supremely upon that glory which, being something external and apart from man, can never properly be his own.

Now, which of all these absurdities will you discover in the doctrine of Christ? His was rather the doctrine which first brought to light the hitherto quite unknown principles of purity, of self-denial, of forbearance, of meekness, of submission, and of humility. And so holy a doctrine—how could it have ever proceeded from a man so unholy? Had He not brought it down with Him from heaven, where and from what books did He learn it in such perfection? From what porticoes? from what universities? from what academies? Or, at least, how was it possible, when He communicated it to them, that He should never once have dropped the smallest expression that was irreverent, or mischievous, or redundant, or frivolous, or absurd, or fanciful, or facetious, that, in short, was more calculated to flatter the ears than to improve the morals of mankind? His business being to propagate an entirely new religion, one unheard of for many ages, not to mention its being so strict and difficult in its practice, how was it possible for Him to have delivered Himself constantly in such a manner as at once to satisfy every candid and well-regulated mind; and that He should in every part of His doctrine have exhibited so close a connection in the argument, such an air of truth,

such a conformity with reason, that nothing in it appears said for the display of wit, but all for the use of edification—said, moreover, with such a complete adaptation of style that the ignorant may soon come to know all they need, the wise be always left in admiration of some mystery they can never fathom, and every class of persons find it the instruction best suited to their condition; conveyed to them also in a solid, practical manner, quite unlike those fanciful and high-flown instructions which we read in the books of human philosophers? And think you to convince me that a religion such as this originated with a person who, so far from being a saint, may with justice be called a worthless sinner; just as if the produce of men's minds were the only kind of children which bear no resemblance to their parents? No: I rather prefer to believe St. James when he asserts: "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man."* I can quite understand a hypocrite speaking vastly well for a limited time; but for a person at any time whatsoever, in any place whatsoever, on any topic you choose, so to express himself that not a jot or tittle can be detected in his words which does not breathe the most exalted sanctity—oh! here indeed is one who cannot be a cheat and impostor, but must needs be a speaker of truth and "without guile"! "The mask may be worn on the countenance for a time, but never long," so says Seneca.

5. And yet, during how many centuries have people been doing nothing else but ventilating and sifting this very doctrine in the hope of making it appear to be all mere chaff. Give me an instance of any other law on which so many learned men have employed their studies, and even ex-

* St. James iii. 2.

hausted their lives, with so rich a harvest of noble reflections in their attempts to explain it; which has been analyzed in so many discussions, expounded in so many volumes, rehearsed in so many cathedrals, settled in so many councils, and sanctioned by so many canons; and which, like the diamond tested beneath the unsparing sledge-hammer, has always gained in point of credit and evidence in proportion as it has been subjected to fresh scrutiny and opposition? Just the reverse of this has befallen other religions; for the more their learned men studied them, the less they gave them credit. This was the case among the heathens with Anaxagoras, Plato, Homer, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, Plutarch, Plotinus, Porphyry, and Galen, and numbers beside them. When they came to age and had attained to a competent knowledge, they examined carefully the grounds of the national belief in which they had been educated; and then they came not only to condemn it as being false, but even to ridicule it as being absurd; though it is quite true that afterwards, from want of firmness or from some self-interested, worldly motive, they dissembled in their conversation those opinions which they had confided to their written works. It was this, at a later period, that prompted the crafty Mahomet to vilify all literature and learning among his followers, and to resolve upon deciding every controversy by the sword, which he esteemed in his Koran to be the truest instrument in the world for propagating religion. But what did he gain by this? He was unable to prevent an Avicenna and an Averroes from making the highest attainments in wisdom in spite of him. And behold these very men, the two most enlightened Moors he had, now straightway bearing witness against that very religion which they professed! For they did not scruple to state candidly in their writings

that the stupid religion of Mahomet taught a happiness for the bodies of men such as brute beasts delight in, and not a happiness for the souls of men such as all the wise desire, and they conferred on it the signal praise of being a religion not fit for men, but for such swine as the herd of Epicurus. So true it is that other religions can hardly boast of a single learned man who ever cordially consented to make his religion the rule of his own life.

But, if we consider this law of Christ, how many such may be mentioned in a moment! This was commended in the highest terms of praise by St. Dionysius, this by Lactantius, this by Arnobius, this by St. Cyprian, this by St. Basil, this by St. Bonaventure, this by St. Thomas, this by numberless other persons, all men of the keenest intellects, who, independently of this particular question, were admirably well versed in every other department of science, whether human or divine, natural or political, of their own or of another land. By what means then did a person of this stamp, a man who was the greatest of sinners, ever contrive to gain the approbation and attachment of so many enlightened persons—to gain it to such a degree that they dedicated the remainder of their lives to nothing else than writing about Him, laboring in His service, and preaching His law? Still, it would not have been so remarkable had they rested satisfied with barely loving Him themselves: the wonder was the strong desire they had that everybody else should love Him as well; and that, in order to this, He should be as universally known and everywhere appreciated as He was among themselves.

6. And where, in what other country, has zeal yielded such a noble harvest? Come, let the Scythians, let the Persians, let the Bactrians, let the Indians, let the Japanese speak; let them inform me whom did they ever send on a

mission to Italy to make us acquainted with their beloved gods? Not one of them was ever disposed to abandon the comforts of his native home on such an errand; nor did they evince the least anxiety whether their pagodas were adored by many or by few, whether they were in honor or dishonor, whether they were known elsewhere or unknown. Whereas, how many noble-minded missionaries could I enumerate who were, who even still are, continually leaving Italy for foreign shores with no other reward before them than that of bringing souls to the knowledge of our God! And oh! how great are the sufferings of these missionaries! They willingly banish themselves for ever from the land of their birth; they refuse to be detained by the entreaties of their friends, the tears of their relations, the heart-rending groans of their parents. They renounce distinction, they renounce affluence; they go forth to find a grave in the fearful depths of the ocean, some of them attacked by pirates, some of them shipwrecked, some of them devoured alive by sea-monsters, some of them made the sport of the pitiless storm and tempest. At one time they are consumed with heat under the torrid zone; at another, they are benumbed with cold under the frozen Triones. Without food, without a guide, without a companion, when once landed on some distant side of the globe—some regions of which the very sun itself appears to stand in fear—they set out, many with bare feet, to traverse the flinty deserts, the tangled defiles, the terrific rocks; and then, having tracked the savage natives, like so many bears, to their secluded caves, they pursue them, they befriend them, they caress them; and all this for no other reward than that of bringing them to know Christ. And what think you of this? Could a man, whom you suppose to be so intolerably wicked, have ever succeeded in winning over to

His side such votaries to do Him honor; persons willing for the sake of spreading His name and worship to expose themselves to such severe hardships and trials? Yea, more, for this is saying little—to surrender their own lives on His account? Who has ever been known to induce such multitudes as our Jesus has been able to do, to submit to every kind and degree of suffering, persecution, and torture, from a pure disinterested motive of love cherished towards Him.

7. Pause now awhile, and listen to an observation of singular beauty. When King David, in order to screen his own character, was anxious to get rid of the unhappy Urias, do you know what he did? He had recourse to a manœuvre. He wrote a letter to the chief captain of the army, and directed him to have Urias exposed in the foremost rank, in the thickest and most furious shock of the battle, and there abandoned to certain death. He then gave this letter—what I am telling you is strictly true—he then gave this letter to Urias himself, that he, of all other men, should be the person to carry and deliver it; but mark, he gave it him well folded and sealed; nor did it ever occur to him, should the poor wretch get the slightest insight into its contents, or even suspect their nature, that he would still proceed, and faithfully deliver it. Christ did not act thus towards His disciples. His letter He gave them open. He plainly told them in His Gospel that He sent them to meet an infinity of wrongs, indignities, and cruelties. “Behold I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves;”* and in another place, “They shall lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and into prisons, dragging you before kings and governors, for My

* St. Matt. x. 16.

name's sake;"* and in another place, "The hour cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doth a service to God;"† and in another place, "They will deliver you up in councils and they will scourge you;"‡ and in another place, "They shall deliver you up to be afflicted and shall put you to death;"§ and in another place, "And ye shall be betrayed by your parents and brethren and kinsmen and friends, and some of you they will put to death."|| Notwithstanding this, what numbers of them went forth and faithfully delivered this letter! They delivered it to the presidents; they delivered it to the proconsuls; they delivered it to the kings themselves on their thrones; no fears deterred them from presenting that Gospel in the quarters where they knew such cruel sufferings must await them; yea, to the very persons who were to inflict those sufferings with the utmost atrocity. And was not there in this something most astonishing? Oh! what constancy! Oh! what courage! Oh! what fidelity! And could all this be ever done for the sake of a man who was a sinner? I am quite aware that even among the Mahometans, the heathen, and the heretics, some such voluntary martyr has been found who would sooner die than betray his fidelity to his crazy-headed legislator. But, in the first place, the death these persons had to endure was nothing uncommon, and their pains did not last long. Not a case can be produced among them of a martyr patiently suffering for fourteen years, as did St. Gregory of Armenia; or twenty-eight years, as did St. Clement of Ancyra. And, if called at any time to endure a lingering death, they submitted with grief and reluctance, and not, as every one of the Christians did, with a contented, happy smile; so that,

* St. Luke xxi. 19.

§ St. Matt. xxiv. 9.

† St. John xvi. 2.

‡ St. Matt. x. 19.

| St. Luke xxi. 26.

impossible as it may appear to Cicero in his philosophy for any one, however wise, to rejoice in his being enclosed in the burning bull of the celebrated Perillus, that engineer of hell, yet we have actually seen this exemplified in an Antipas, a bishop; in a Pelagia, a virgin; in an Eustachius, and in all his family, who, being thrust into the red-hot, fiery ox, bellowed, as it were, from its mouth in accents of joy and in songs of victory. Not to mention another fact, that, even granting some of them to have died with great fortitude, we find this to have invariably happened in the case of persons of a strong bodily constitution, or of a determined self-will, or of a frame inured to hardships. Never did it happen in the instance of weak, declining old age, nor of the frail tender sex, nor of susceptible early youth, nor of easily-frightened childhood, nor even of sweet, gentle infancy, as it happened among ourselves. And what a glorious, godly spectacle it was to behold a bishop, Simeon, at the age of a hundred and twenty years, singing songs on his cross, like a most melodious swan; to behold two little boys, Justus and Pastor, making a jubilee between every stroke of the lash; to behold two dear children, Mammes and Vito, rejoicing on the scaffold; to hear Eulalia, an illustrious virgin of thirteen years old, who, completely covered with wounds, loudly invoked the tyrant to order that plenty of salt should be immediately sprinkled over her, so as to render her a more grateful morsel to the palate of her Beloved! Other martyrs, it is true, endured their tortures; but never did they go forth to greet them. Never would they have acted like that Julian, who, fearing, in consequence of his lameness, that he would not reach the slaughter-house in time to join his fellow-martyrs, got himself carried there without delay in the sturdy arms of some slaves; nor like that Apollonia, who

cast herself into the flames; nor like that Agapetus, who threw himself among the wild beasts; nor like that Antonius, who, dressed all in white, went to his martyrdom as to a nuptial festival. And, even if their martyrs did voluntarily offer themselves to their murderers, it so turned out that they had afterwards no means to retreat and to effect their deliverance. It may be, they went to their martyrdom out of love; but it was sheer compulsion that kept them to it. Not so with the Christians. Incessantly were they implored by their enemies to have some pity on themselves. They were courted with smiles, enticed with promises, besieged with liberal offers in the shape of money, jewels, fortunes, honors, dignities; but all so ineffectually, that a bishop, no less famous than Cyprian, when his head was just on the block, declared the very executioner who was on the point of beheading him to be heir to his whole property. And, after all, supposing no other difference between the two cases, yet their martyrs were so few in number that we can name them in a breath or gather them in a handful; whereas ours can scarcely be counted, Genebrand reckoning them at full eleven millions; those, I mean, that were the most primitive, the most unquestioned, and the most renowned.

8. I am well aware how shrewdly it may here be objected in reply, that the fact of having raised up such a host of martyrs proves the existence at the same time of numerous persecutors; and that a question may therefore arise as to which party, in the cause of Christ, we should lend our confidence to—whether to the person who stood up in His defence, or to the person who persecuted Him as His enemy. But observe in how many ways I can overrule this objection. It is quite true that Christ met with many persecutors. But, in the first place, we do not know who

were the most numerous, they or His martyrs; while of this we are certain, that a single persecutor was quite enough to kill many martyrs, but no single martyr could require many persecutors. Moreover, must not more weight unquestionably be attached to the evidence of the man who died for Christ than to the evidence of the man who opposed Him? Some obliquity of mind, some heat of the blood, some incentive of envy, some impulse of anger, will suffice to make a persecutor; but to give one's life for the sake of another—to give it, I say, in the prospect of such atrocious tortures and with such a calm, complete self-possession, this sacrifice demands a very high esteem for the person in whose behalf we make it. What constancy, what courage, what fidelity are here required! Can there, then, be any doubt but that the evidence of a single martyr must outweigh, in the cause of Christ, that of a hundred persecutors?

Consider, in addition to this, how widely the persecutors differed in their characters from the martyrs. The bulk of the latter consisted of men who had conducted themselves well from their youth, having been either dragged from their cloisters, or from their hermitages, or from their academies, or from their churches; men of wisdom, of integrity, of modest, retiring, mortified dispositions, in whom their very enemies could find nothing criminal, excepting their faith in Christ; as Pliny, one of those enemies, bare witness in his Epistle to Trajan—that is, to an emperor—who would be more pleased, he well knew, in hearing the Christians accused than commended. Whereas, on the other hand, what sort of people were the persecutors? What were the majority of them but ignorant, low-minded, overbearing men, trained in the brothels, educated in the theatres, and frequently taken from the roll of the gladia-

tors ? Do you, then, tell me Christians were persecuted ? Nothing certainly is more true. But by whom were they persecuted ? By a Nero, an abortion of man's nature ; by a Domitian, killed by his own people for being a monster of cruelty ; by a Gallien, abhorred by his biographers as a prodigy of shame ; by a Galerian, who afterwards became so sad an object of detestation and disgust not only to his enemies, nor even to his subjects, nor yet to his domestics, but to himself, that with his own hand he committed suicide ; by a Trajan, so great a beast that I cannot inform you without blushing of his excessive depravity ; by a Decius, by a Diocletian, by a Maxentius, by a Licinius, by a Maximinus, all of them men born, it would seem, only to degrade the race of mankind. Can any person, therefore, be so utterly demented as to consider Christ the greatest sinner in the world because He was persecuted by such reprobates as these ? We shall rather be disposed, when we consider the matter, to draw hence the most convincing proof of His great holiness ; since nothing more indubitably shows the surpassing brilliancy of the sun than the extreme aversion which all the ugly birds of the night entertain towards it.

9. Did, then, these and like persecutors ultimately prevail against Christ ? When other religions had to contend with powerful oppressors, we all know they soon yielded ; at one time cowed by authority, at another vanquished by force. But where was it that our religion ever took deeper root than among its enemies ? If ever a city was most bitterly intent on persecuting the name of Christian, that city was Rome. She was not satisfied with covering the arenas of her theatres and filling the jaws of her wild beasts with our blood. In her thirst for our complete annihilation, she despatched beyond her own borders, as far as Africa and even

Asia, rabid proconsuls to track us out to our places of concealment, to condemn us when accused, to butcher us when we stood firm. But what has she done by all this? She has brought herself to resign her empire to the very cause she so persecuted. To us she has transferred her palaces, to us her temples, to us her universal supremacy; and she who used to be the most savage persecutress that Christianity ever had, afterwards became its most gentle and affectionate nurse. And how, then, is it that a man, spoken of as being so transcendently wicked, could ever effect such mighty things? Has He, forsooth, gained His triumphs by force of arms, by a deluge of armies, by a whirlwind of terrors? Oh! just so! For this gigantic acquisition He has procured no more than the assistance of twelve fishermen to preach for Him—poor, illiterate, mendicant, despised men, and, what is still worse, Jews—men belonging to a nation then held in contempt and abhorrence; and with these men He has seized upon Rome; with these men He has subdued His enemies; with these men He has vanquished barbarians; with these men He has brought the pride of philosophers under His dominion. The Roman Senate admitted Alexander the Great among its deities, because it looked upon the man who could overcome the whole world in the short space of twelve years as being no ordinary person. Alexander, however, accomplished this whilst he was yet alive and in the possession of vast resources and the ruler of many people; whereas Christ subjugated the world unto Himself after He was crucified. He did it without the help of money, without the clash of arms; “Not with iron, but with wood.”* And shall any after this not only refuse to adore Him as a man who was

* St. Augustine.

Divine, but condemn Him as a man who **was** the worst of his species?

10. I know that in the prosecution of His vast undertaking, He employed that superhuman power which passes among us under the name of miraculous. But can that man be the worst of all men in the world at whose Name the elements bow down in awe and all nature quakes in fear? Who counselled thee, O thou chief among the planets, to clothe thyself in dark apparel, and to mourn at the death of a crucified man, for whose punishment, had He only been a counterfeit god, thou oughtest rather to have shined forth with delight than veiled thyself in dismay? O ye rocks! what induced you to burst asunder; ye graves, to open your jaws; ye precipices, to rush into the bowels of the earth on so happy an occasion? Was this, then, the special gratitude you evinced to your Maker, thus to express your strong indignation at the death of one who, worse than Lucifer himself, not only aspired to be an assessor with God on His throne, but to reign on that throne supreme?

But should any one be mad enough here to pretend that Christ suffered on the cross the punishment due to such audacity on His part, how, then, do you account for this, that so many dumb, at the simple invocation of His name, should have learned to speak, so many lame to walk, so many deaf to hear, so many blind to recover their perfect sight, and even so many dead to return to life? "How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles?"* I will go further. Mention to the evil spirits any other name you please. Mention Mahomet, mention Ali, mention Amida, mention the still expected Messiah of the Jews; and just see whether they won't laugh at you for your pains. Men

* St. John ix. 36.

tion Jesus, and behold whether they do not dread Him and tremble at His name. Jesus! Jesus! This, after all, is the only Name that has confounded them, that has paralyzed them, that has thrown them all into a collapse. And, oh! the good reason we have to speak of that Name, as being "poured out" upon us all! "Thy Name is as oil poured out."* To ourselves it has proved a healing oil, which has restored immediate health to thousands and thousands; but to the devils it has proved an oil scalding them to death. I remember to have read, in the fatal war of Palestine, that the people of Cirsa, on their seeing the Romans already scaling triumphantly their city walls, when unable by any other means to stop or repel them, emptied upon their backs, as they advanced, bucketsful of burning oil. This, penetrating through their armor, reached their skin, and so passed to their inward vitals, till it brought them down headlong into the trench below, foaming with indignation. Oh! how striking is the comparison. The evil spirits had spread their hitherto victorious banners over all the world; they had taken possession of every quarter; they had made themselves masters of every position; when this oil (oh! its tremendous heat!) this *oil of the Name of Jesus*, was *poured out* upon them, the agonizing torture whereof sunk them all into that profound abyss from whence, in their daring insolence, they came to the attack. "When they were lifted up, Thou hast cast them down."† Accordingly, my hearers, no sooner was the Name of Jesus magnified in the world than all the oracles of Lesbos, of Delphi, of Delos, of Ephesus, of Dodona, of Daphne, were struck dumb; all the powers of darkness were rendered effete and breathless; they so utterly lost, we may say, the very power of speech that that sinner of a Porphyry, stung

* Cant. i. 9.

† Ps. lxxii. 19.

with rage, was compelled to acknowledge, "Since Jesus has been worshipped, our gods have done nothing for us."

What impression, my hearers, does all this make upon you? Such mighty, such palpable, such evident, such gigantic effects as these are—is it possible they could ever be produced by invoking the name of the greatest sinner among men? Who can be so foolish as, by entertaining such a notion, to do violence to all plain common sense, not to speak of higher and heavenly considerations? But if so, then let us conclude, beyond doubt, that Christ is God; for, as we proved before, there is no middle point in this case. His wickedness must either be supreme, or His Divinity must be, above all things, sure. And then, if He is God, it is enough. I need be at no trouble to prove the truth of the doctrines He has commanded us to believe the Creed, the Sacraments, and other like tenets. However we may grant these to be difficult to our low understanding, to be abstruse, to be above us, what does it matter? We are preserved from all possibility of falling into error in a case where, supposing error to exist, it must have been God Himself who caused us to err.

THE SECOND PART.

11. Oh! yes, you have not a little murmured against me this morning within yourselves, blaming me for one or other of these two things: either that I have preached a sermon utterly useless before such an audience, or that of such an audience I have betrayed a very bad opinion? And was this, then, a sermon to be preached in Pisa, a city so profoundly attached to the Name of Christ? Ought it not rather to have been reserved, till some contrary winds had driven me to the shores of Tunis or the coasts of Algiers?

Excuse me, gentle sirs, in your reflecting upon me thus; for I thought that, by the apology with which I prefaced my sermon, I had sufficiently obviated all such complaints. But as you now oblige me to speak freely, I beseech you, at least, not to take offence at what I say. Perhaps I have erred in addressing you as I have done; because, as you rank among the most ancient Christians in the land, so, it may be, you ought to be among the most irreproachable. Still, I cannot but think that, as a general rule, no topic ought to be more frequently and universally insisted upon among Christians than the duty of their holding fast the truth of the religion they profess.

For how is it ever possible for them, believing it to be thus true, to act like persons who believe it to be an imposture? To act like them, did I say? Worse, worse, far worse, I ought to have said; so long as a sin is habitual among Christians which is not even known to unbelievers. Show me a heathen, belonging to any one of their odious sects, who in his own land and among his own people is ashamed of avowing it. The Turk is not ashamed to go about as a Turk; nor the Jew to behave as a Jew; nor a Gentile to live after the manner of Gentiles. It is the Christian only, I find, who is ashamed to act in his character as a Christian. Mark the truth of what I say. There is one of your own nobles, determined to have his revenge for some affront that has been offered him. Accordingly, he arms a band of hired ruffians, and with these he lays an ambush against his enemy, now in the city, now in the fields, and pursues him to the very death. Very well. Now, suppose you were employed to deter this man from his purpose, what arguments would you use as most likely to prevail with him? Would you perhaps say, "My dear lord, remember that you are a Christian. Disarm, disarm these

men, because it is not lawful for you to take revenge"? Why, any of you, using language like this, would be set down as a fool; and, at all events, the nobleman himself would laugh at you, expecting you to display less zeal and more common sense. Whereas, if you were to submit to him that by thus taking his revenge he would be acting beneath his position in society; or, still more, were you to tell him that his sovereign had prohibited such acts of revenge, or that it was the special wish of his lady that he should proceed no further in the business, he would not feel ashamed to give you a hearing. And if, at last, he should yield to your representations, and be led to accept a reconciliation, do you believe that he would then have sufficient courage to go and declare to this effect: "I forgive my enemy the wrong he has done me, because the religion I profess lays this obligation upon me. I am a Christian. I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ"? Why, in a nobleman of his stamp, this would be regarded as something ludicrous and beneath him; which it would by no means appear had he given out that he had granted the pardon to please his lady or to show submission to his sovereign. And do you, then, really regard our religion as being the true one? You cannot, sirs, you cannot. For how is it possible for you not simply to omit doing what it requires, which may be imputed to your weakness, but that you should consider it something derogatory, or, I may rather say, something downright disgraceful in you to obey its precepts?

Or, again, how would it be possible for you not to permit the people freely and independently to practise it? Would you assert that the truth of our religion was allowed by those presidents, or those proconsuls, or those tyrants who, in former times, forbade the Christians openly de-

claring themselves to be such ; who compelled them, when they wished to celebrate their most holy mysteries, to seek concealment either in the catacombs or in the cemeteries ? I don't think you would. Tell me, then, do you never compel any of your own people to go in search, if not of the most secret catacombs, yet of the most lonely churches ; and, if not of the most obscure cemeteries, yet of the most out-of-the-way chapels, to escape your ridicule, whensoever they may have a wish, under a deeper sense of devotion, to unite in the sacred services or to refresh themselves with the Bread of Heaven ? And what jesting do you make of that young woman who prefers a more simple and rather antiquated style of dress, and of that young man who takes delight in the conversation of those most devoted to religion ! And is not this by overt acts to oppose the practice of our faith, even as the tyrannous unbelievers of old once did ? This difference only I can discover between them and you : they opposed it with the sword, you oppose it with ridicule ; and ridicule will often cut sharper than the sword, insomuch that a person has been known to succumb under the sportive banter of people about him, whom no poisoned daggers of the barbarians could ever have deterred from acting publicly in the most Christian manner.

Hear, however, something still worse. Sins the most abandoned, sensual indulgences the most brutish, plainly forbidden, as they are, in that Law which you hold to be true—these are often turned by you into subjects of boasting, as acts of prowess, things to make you happy, things you may be proud of ; and, when you hear of them in others, you encourage them by the award of your approval and satisfaction ; you embellish your literature with them ; you admit them into your academies ; you rapturously applaud them in your theatres. And is this faith ?

Is this, sirs, your faith? A sin committed does not, I know, eradicate the principle of faith from our minds; but to encourage sin and to applaud sin—alas! this clearly evinces an incipient stage towards unbelief. For what else, speaking correctly, is unbelief than to entertain opinions contrary to the instructions Christ has given us, to commend what He blames, to blame what He commends? I had, then, but too much reason on my side when I expressed a belief that no one thing among Christians is so necessary at the present time as to set Christ before them, impressing their minds with a firm belief of His being the true God; for, beyond all doubt, they will by this means be led to pay Him greater veneration; nor will people then consider that disgraceful which He regards as honorable, nor regard that as honorable which He considers disgraceful.

This very morning, therefore, form this most indispensable rule of life (do so, I beseech you, for that faith's sake which you profess)—never for the future to let any words pass your lips which may redound to the approval of vice or to the discouragement of virtue. Do not shrink from any opportunities offered you of frankly avowing yourselves to be Christian men; of patiently enduring ill-treatment, as Christians; of conducting yourselves at church as Christians; of promoting peace, quietness, and charity, our leading characteristics, as Christians; of never sucking the blood of the poor, which is the blood of Christ. And when you have done all this that I advise you, then you are quite welcome to complain of your preacher for such a sermon as he ought rather to have reserved for the people at Tunis or at Algiers.

SERMON VIII.

ON RECONCILING OUR MINDS TO THE THOUGHT OF DEATH.

"Behold, a dead man was carried out, the only son of his mother."
—ST. LUKE VII. 12.

1. No affection of the mind usually renders a man, in my opinion, more extremely superstitious in his conduct, more irresolute, more incapable, and, if you will, more ridiculous, than the overfear of death. Hence, you may notice certain persons who, though invited to hear the preaching of a Chrysologus or a Chrysostom, brought back from their graves to address them—not to speak of any poor preacher like myself—would on no account go with the crowd to church on this particular day. Only then fancy whether these same persons would ever keep in their possession any little memento or representation whatever of death; or whether they would ever introduce the subject, by way of serious conversation, in their families. They would forthwith take alarm at that disastrous omen of Philip of Macedon, who, having the night before asserted in some society that, of all kinds of death, a sudden death was the most desirable, proved the very next morning the truth of what he said—just as if, following up his own opinion, he had chosen it for himself. Why speak to such people about making their wills? They would suppose that, this being once done, nothing on earth now remained for them, but that

they had best get out of the world with the utmost expedition, as persons become quite useless and no longer wanted. They also, after the example of the heathen, have their unlucky days; and who would ever induce them on any one of those days to commence a distant journey? So entirely would they give themselves up for dead men that not even the prospect of acquiring a kingdom would reconcile them to leaving their homes. What shall the sumptuous banquet profit them, and the richly loaded table? Should they chance to espy that the number of the seats was, according to their creed, one to be considered fatal, never would they be prevailed upon to sit down there, through all eternity, though dying of hunger. Happy astrologers! What a fine price will these people give you in exchange for your trumpery! They contrive by all means in their power to ascertain the secret of their nativity, that so they may know the special danger they have to avoid; whether from the sword, from the fire, from the water, or from the precipice; and they will almost go so far as to imitate that Artemon of old, who invariably made two of his servants carry a target over his head, from the apprehension he had of what might come tumbling upon him. To such palpable acts of folly are men not unfrequently driven by their extravagant fears of death.

Still, my brethren, I must plainly tell you that were such cases to be found only in the ranks of the wicked, the self-willed, and headstrong, it would not surprise me. These wretched beings have indeed much cause to shudder at the thought of their last exit, which must be their awful passage to Hell. But that the same thing should be found among persons on the whole religiously inclined, and in their principles and mode of life rather strict and devout than otherwise, this does really fill me with astonishment. And how

does it strike you, my Christian hearers? Is it, then, so miserable a thing to die that because you saw this morning a "dead man carried out" to his burial, you are all ready to hasten far away from the affecting scene? Ah! no; I beseech you, stop; for my mind has been stirred up to venture, for your sakes, on a noble enterprise. I would fain attempt to deliver you in some measure from the bondage of that fear, which is a most serious obstacle to your ever applying your mind in good earnest to the consideration of your latter end. Nor, unless I mistake, will my task be difficult. We observe how little children, when by some accident they see a mask at a distance, are thrown into such a panic of fear that they immediately rush with cries to their mothers' arms to hide themselves. What, then, can we best do to compose them? Why, place in their own hands the mask itself, the mighty cause of their trepidation. For in this way they will not only soon cease to fear it, but will come and play and amuse themselves with it, talk to it, and feel much hurt if you show the least wish to snatch it out of their hands. Now, this is the very manner in which, with your kind permission, I intend to deal with you on the present occasion. I wish just to make you with your own hands feel what, after all, this death really is, and to convince you by this process that you are not justified in so mightily fearing it, but ought rather gladly to entertain, if not even heartily to desire, its coming. One thing alone I must take for granted, as I hinted before; it is that I am addressing persons actuated by some sense of true religion. Give me, therefore, your attention, and without further preface we will enter on our subject; proceeding, however, step by step, so as not to omit a single one of those motives which, like an industrious bee, I have collected from the healthy stores of my religious

reading, and with a view to my own edification, as well as to yours.

2. Who among you, my brethren, has ever had to travel in the winter along a road, narrow, precipitous, incommoded with stones, and surrounded with danger? You fall in with some countryman engaged there in repairing the hedges or feeding his flock. What is it you at once ask him? "Pray, is there any other road than this to the town?" If he informs you that there is another road, vastly superior, more safe, more convenient in every respect, how angry you are immediately with the guide, who to your immense annoyance took you the very worst way. But, should you come to find that his road was the public one and the only road, by which all travellers without exception must pass, then you shrug up your shoulders, and, however troublesome your journey may prove, you pursue it with a greater degree of patience and resignation. Now, what, my hearers, is the inference I would have you deduce from this? Here it is. When we come to die, if we had to traverse, not a beaten path, but an unfrequented and lonely one, there would be nothing strange under these circumstances in our complaining of the man who guided us: but, since the road before us is one common to mankind in general, cheer up—I say, cheer up, my hearers: for we have no right to feel aggrieved that we, too, must travel over it just like other people. "I am going the way of all flesh." * This was precisely the consoling thought with which David fortified his mind when he reached that formidable place of passage—"I must take the main road." With this, Josue; with this, Jacob; and with this, all good men have armed themselves, who, according to the expression of the most enlightened Idiot, "had no fear of

* 3 Kings ii. 14.

death." And why? "Because they considered that whatsoever must of necessity be done, must be done by us cheerfully." And really, our presumption must not be inconsiderable, if we take it ill of death that he has not spared *us*, when he refused to spare the Abrahams, so eminent for their piety; the Josephs, so renowned for their chastity, the Solomons, so famous for their wisdom; the Rachels, so attractive for their beauty; the Judiths, so intrepid for their valor. These magnanimous souls, worthy for the good of the community to have abided for ever in this world, are nevertheless all gone; and shall our going seem to us something so intolerable—we perhaps being, as St. Jude wrote, *trees without fruit* upon the earth, more likely to disgrace than to honor it, more likely to prove its encumbrance than its gain?

3. It is quite useless for you to tell me, as the common talk goes, that you are not so much grieved at having to die as at your being obliged, in the present state of things, to die so soon; and that you think it hard we should not still, while here, enjoy the longevity of those Noes, of those Arphaxads, of those Nachors, of those Mathusalas, of those Thares, every one of whom was privileged to share in the festive doings of more than a single century. Oh! what paltry regrets! Oh! what low-minded wishes! You have only to advance a step further, and, in imitation of old Theophrastus mentioned by Tully, vehemently to express your envy of the stags, or the ravens, or the crows, whom nature has indulged with a longer period of life than she has granted to her favorite race of mankind. And what is the mighty happiness to be enjoyed here below that renders a long life so very desirable?

We read of the Israelites that they spent their days in Egypt under severer hardships than perhaps ever fell to

the lot of any other people. Had in suspicion of the princes, in hatred of the rulers, in neglect of the nation at large, they were sunk into the lowest slough of infamy and of decay. Sentenced to never-ending hard labor, here they were dispersed to gather straw, here to cut down trees, here to cart away sand, here to heat furnaces, here to convey blocks of stone; and, in return for all this, their only wages was to be beaten. Continually bastinadoed, and without any fault of theirs, they could not demand justice; unless at the risk of being assailed, as a substitute for it, with bitter scoffs and contemptuous invectives. More than this, the most active measures were taken to exterminate them altogether; and, just as if to have children born to them was a tremendous crime, all their little ones were condemned to the waters of the Nile or to the teeth of the crocodile. On what account did the Almighty suffer these Hebrews, a people whom He so much loved and valued, ever to come into Egypt to endure such vile treatment as this? St. Chrysostom shrewdly supplies the answer. God suffered this, in order to prevent the Hebrews from becoming too fond of Egypt, and to incline them rather to dislike and detest it, so that they might be more willing to leave it when He should afterwards call them to the land of promise. In order to make them hate Egypt, "He suffered them to endure hardships in works of brick, and clay, and all sorts of rubbish."

Now, God employs a similar device in order to wean our affections from this mortal life. He has ordained it to be a life of toil and trouble, of hardship and distress; now oppressed with terrible ailments, now disquieted with inconsolable sorrows, always liable to be molested with a thousand inroads of strange vicissitudes and reverses. He has, moreover, so willed it, that the further we advance in years, the

more we become subject to afflictions and to necessities ; so that it may pain us the less to leave the world. "Arise and depart ; for there is no rest here for you." So by the mouth of Micheas* would the Lord seem to give us an answer. "Arise, and depart ; for there is no rest here for you." And yet we poor creatures can never make up our minds to say, "Let us depart" ; but no sooner do we discern the least symptoms of the migration we are taught to expect than our minds become agitated, the blood runs cold in our veins, and our spirits quite die away within us. We would fain, even in old age, obtain from heaven the reprieve of a single additional year. And do we not, beyond all doubt, hereby incur that severe reproof addressed by God to the wretched Ephraim, whom He called a foolish dove, a dove without sense or reason ? "Ephraim is become as a dove that is decoyed, not having a heart."† But what, you will ask, is the particular silliness exemplified by the dove ? Shall I tell you ? The love the poor creature has for its tower. For, in spite of all the ill-usage it is receiving from day to day, the plunder of its young ones, the slaughter of its companions, the robbery of its eggs, the foolish creature still perseveres in going back and rebuilding its nest. The like to this is seen among ourselves. We are constantly witnessing the failure of our worldly projects. We are persecuted by men in power, we are supplanted by rivals. The very things, of all others, the most dear to us are snatched away ; and yet we go on still loving our treacherous dove-cote ; we go on still clinging tenderly to our darling nest ; and we are still proposing to take up our delectable and happy abode in it, just as if there was no dwelling-place in store for us beyond, one **as**

* Micheas ii. 20.

† Os. vii. 22.

vastly superior to our present home as a royal palace is to the nest of a dove.

4. But even suppose the entertainment we get in this life were most commodious and most hospitable, can we tell, on the other hand, whether our dying at a later period would prove more to our spiritual advantage than our dying sooner? Historians have affirmed, in the case of Pompey the Great, that nothing was wanting, in order to his being the most successful and glorious man in all the world, but his dying ten years earlier. It was a like mischance that prevented Nero from being one of the most renowned for clemency, and Galba from being one of the most looked up to for administrative powers. Whereas what was the happier destiny of an Alexander? Was it that he vanquished Darius, that he overcame Porus, that he dictated laws to the Indians? Not so; it was that he died so young. Had he only survived a little longer, it is thought unquestionable that, as the West was now arming in opposition against him, he would have forfeited his splendid title of "the Great." Just so, as in these cases, oh! had numbers died but a single year sooner, they would now be ranked among the most distinguished and most eminent saints in Paradise, whereas, in consequence of their life having been prolonged, they have to groan in the hell of the finally condemned!

Why, then, should we fear even a premature death, when this very circumstance may be the means of our salvation? I observe that, on your foreseeing the approach of the hurricane ready to make an onslaught on your property, you do not delay a single moment to get your standing corn reaped, though it be not yet quite ripe for the harvest. You contrive to have the grapes cut, and the apples gathered, and the oranges stored, though they have not yet acquired

their full golden hue, and therefore have not yet completed their proper time and season. And why, then, should we feel hurt if God manifest towards us a like consideration and a like pity, such as each person will manifest towards his property to prevent its receiving damage? "His soul pleased God"—mark what the author of the Book of Wisdom states to be the special sign of a soul precious to God—"His soul pleased God." God cherished an exceeding love for that soul, placed, as it was, in a state of jeopardy. What then did He do? Why, He hastened to remove him out of the world; not in judgment, as it is with the votaries of sin, but in order to his salvation. "Therefore He hastened to bring him out of the midst of iniquities." *

5. And only tell me, my hearers, in sober truth, what man among us, so long as he lives, is not constantly, whether he will or no, exposed to the most imminent danger of falling into sin and thereby of ruining his soul? A certain philosopher of the name of Stesichorus was once asked what kind of vessel was the safest at sea; whether, for instance, a large ship, or a tartan, or a light galley, or any other sort of keel that ploughs the main. With much shrewdness he instantly replied that the safest vessel was the one that was already hauled up on shore—intimating that, to whatever class it might belong, there was no security for it while out at sea. Now, understand this as exactly applying to every mortal man. While he is alive—which is tantamount to saying so long as he is sailing over the tempestuous ocean of this world—he, too, is in the same continual danger of being shipwrecked. Unquestionably, therefore, our most earnest desire should be to get to shore with as little delay as possible. Oh! what whirlwinds, oh! what hurricanes are about us, while we are tossing up and

* Wisdom iv. 14.

down over the yawning deep ! “ We have,” as St. Cyprian represents our condition—“ we have to contend against covetousness, against lewdness, against anger, against ambition, against the sins of the flesh, against the seductions of the world. If we overcome covetousness, lust rises up ; if we subdue lust, ambition takes its place ; if we triumph over ambition, anger inflames, pride puffs up, intemperance misleads, envy destroys peace, emulation separates friendship.” And must we not add to this catalogue the attacks of those freebooters of hell who are perpetually giving us chase on this sea ? The passage where Job speaks of human life as being “ a warfare” * is more forcibly expressed in the Septuagint by “ an incursion of rovers bent on plunder” ; giving us to understand that, though we have so happily escaped the treacherous whirlpools, the sandy shoals, the boisterous winds, the sunk rocks, and the tremendous monsters of the deep, we have still to beware of the clutches of these pirates. I have said enough. Come, we are now all agreed that, until we get into the harbor, there is no security for us ; and, therefore, let us be ready with crowded sails to improve the prosperous gale that drives us towards it. Nor let it be any grief to relinquish these dear bodies of ours. I have myself witnessed a ship’s crew, whose only thought it was, when closely chased by an Algerine corsair, to save their lives. When once safe on shore, it mattered little to them that their felucca fell a prey to these barbarians, and that they actually saw them on the beach breaking it up in pieces with relentless violence or with outrageous insolence. Let whosoever will, then, take possession of our bodies ; let him maul and disfigure them. What is this to us, so long as the soul,

* Job vii. 2.

freighted with all its precious treasure, makes its way to a heavenly rest in perfect security ?

6. A heavenly rest ! Oh ! in that case, you will say, We are quite of your opinion ; we shall then be quite content to die. But who is there to certify us of this ? What invests death with so much terror is the misgiving we have of something worse after it ; our knowing that death is to many a transition from temporal to everlasting sufferings. Hold ! for I understand your meaning ; but you interrupt me needlessly ; for did I not tell you from the beginning that this discourse was not intended for abandoned sinners, who, wallowing in every kind of vice, impenitent and callous, seem purposely bent on doing all they can to involve their souls in perdition ? We have nothing now to do with these unhappy souls. My arguments were not directed to them. I know too well the need they have not merely to fear, but to shudder, to stand aghast at the prospect of their final dissolution. I repeat it, then : my sermon is for a class of persons who are somewhat anxiously concerned about their salvation ; for persons who, if they fall, at once make an effort to rise ; who, if they sin, immediately repent. This I suppose to be the general character of those present, and hence I make bold to declare unto you that at the hour of your death you should have a strong confidence in the most precious blood of Him who glories in that most endearing name, " A helper in due time of tribulation " ; * for never does He disappoint us in our need. To Him, every day you live, you should commend the great business of your final departure hence, earnestly and heartily addressing Him in those affecting words : " Be not thou a terror unto me. Thou art my hope in the day of affliction." † Or, again, " Deliver me out of the hand of

* Ps. lx. 10.

† Jer. xvii. 17.

the wicked."* Or, again, "Cast me not off in the time of old age: when my strength shall fail, do not thou forsake me."†

But, further, if you desire to become possessed of an expeditious method whereby death shall at once translate you to heaven, I have it here at your service. Only practise the lesson I have this morning studied to impress upon your minds: bid death welcome; willingly embrace him. Who among you has not read in Holy Scripture of a certain prophet, who, when despatched, as on a commission requiring the utmost care, to the wicked Jeroboam, transgressed the Divine commandment, which had forbidden his accepting any offer of refreshment and hospitality on his journey, by whomsoever made?‡ For his act of disobedience he was certainly, on his return home, attacked by a furious lion, and was slain. But what then? Not only did the same lion abstain from any attempt to devour him or tear him in pieces, but he actually posted himself near to his carcase, to defend it from any other savage beast, until such time as it was honorably committed to the grave. Now I put it to you: This prophet was either a sinner, or this prophet was a saint? If a saint, how do you account for the lion's attacking him when he was alive? If a sinner, how do you account for the lion's defending him when he was dead? What I happened once to read in St. Gregory gives a most worthy solution of the difficulty. He says that the prophet, at the time of his being attacked, was in fact a sinner—"He was in his life to be blamed"; but that, on his receiving death itself with a perfect readiness and resignation, as in judgment for disobedience, he became a saint. "He was thus made righteous instantly by his death"; and accordingly, as he was ill-

* Jer. xv. 22.

† Ps. lxx. 9.

‡ 3 Kings xiii.

treated at first, like any ordinary man, so he was honored afterwards as a man of God. "Therefore the lion, who before had destroyed the life of a sinner, now preserved the body of a righteous man."

Nor let this surprise you ; for if, under any trial, however inconsiderable, resignation to the will of God is the best proof we can give of our love towards Him, how much more must this be the case in regard to that special trial of our death, from which, beyond all others, we naturally shrink ? Would you, then, feel certain of death's immediately translating you to all the bliss I have described, learn to correct sense ; undeceive it, get the mastery over it, and make a sacrifice of your self-will by cheerfully accepting death at whatever time it may please God to appoint it to you. Be assured that an act such as this will more conduce to your perfection than any other act of your whole former life. Listen to the evidence given to you by St. Augustine. "There are some persons," he observes, "who profess themselves unwilling to die, from the wish to get more time in this life to grow in grace, when, after all, their growth consists in this very thing—that they should be found willing to die. Therefore"—ponder well these next words—"what they do not desire, in order that they may render themselves perfect, let them desire the same, and they are perfect at once." Let the man who desires life with a view to obtain perfection make up his mind willingly to die, and behold him perfect !

7. And may there not be numerous other motives, quite as encouraging and effectual in this matter as those already suggested ? To go back to the point whence we diverged : I would have you weigh well the vast consolation every good man has when, by means of his death, he comes at

last to have an infallible assurance that he is in a state of grace. Oh, how great must be this joy! Oh! the rapture! Oh! the blessedness attending such a discovery, the like to which we never could have experienced all our life long! A lady, whom we will suppose to be supremely anxious about her personal display, would sooner lose any of the fine treasures of her toilet than she would her looking-glass. The loss of this would be to her something exceedingly distressing. And why? Perhaps because she derives from the looking-glass any beauty, or charm, or power of fascinating? Not at all; but because, by using it, she knows herself already to possess these. However fair, elegant, and in the fashion she is; still, without the distinct report and testimony of the dear looking-glass, her appearance does not satisfy her. She will have it to be the sole arbiter of her dress and comeliness. Upon its verdict she relies. With it she takes counsel, while she pays very little attention to what her maidens may affirm on the subject. Accordingly, until she has leisurely surveyed herself in the glass, she still doubts whether the ribbon has quite succeeded in preventing her flowing tresses from running wild; she is still subject to misgivings lest her ringlets are not becomingly adjusted, whether her neck and her face have received their perfect cleanliness and lustre, whether there be not something still amiss in the arrangement of her jewels and the disposition of the veil with which she would fain seem to conceal her bosom. To apply this: Do we not all know the intense anxiety with which good men labor to be adorned with beauty, not as to their outward appearance, but their inward tempers of mind? To be lovely in the sight of God—this always is the fervent desire of pious souls. “I want nothing else,” so speak they in those beautiful words of Jacob—“I want nothing else, but only to

find favor, my Lord, in Thy sight." * It is for the sake of this that they so cheerfully perform the most painful duties of religion, and live a life of watchfulness and mortification. But all for what? They have no looking-glass in this world to assure them of the completion of their desires. It is quite true there are persons at hand who, prompted by compassion or in order to flatter them, are ready to tell them, as these maidens told their mistress, that they need no longer make themselves uneasy, because there is not a single spot or blemish left about them; that all their doings are commendable, all their looks modest, all their gestures becoming, and their whole behavior quite consistent. But then, the poor souls cannot derive comfort from any testimony of man; they have rather cause to fear lest Isaias should have had them in his view when he delivered that warning: "O my people! they that call thee blessed, the same deceive thee, and destroy the way of thy steps." † Hence they begin with Job to suspect all their most ordinary actions: "I feared all my works." ‡ Hence they doubt with David of every lurking imposture: "Cleanse Thou me from my secret faults." § Hence they join Paul in his anxious avowal: "I am not conscious to myself of anything"—my own conscience does not accuse me—"yet am I not hereby justified." || Oh! who can describe the satisfaction in store for these righteous souls when death shall arrive, and hold up before their eyes that bright, undimmed looking-glass of God's particular judgment, and when, after they have seen their true condition, they will be authorized at once to pronounce, "I am clean"? Oh! the transports, the unspeakable ecstasy of delight, to know for a certainty that they are beloved of God, that they are elected to glory, that they are safe for ever!

* Gen. xxxiii. 15. † Isa. iii. 12. ‡ Job ix. 28. § Ps. xviii. 13. || 1 Cor. iv. 4.

8. I am aware that, in comparison of this, every other truth with which they have enlarged their minds, will sink in their estimation. But then, further consider what the effect on their souls will be when (as though a covering were removed from before their eyes) in a moment of time they will behold objects far beyond all their past conceptions, so new, so marvellous, so diversified! I have commonly heard death described as being a sleep; but, to speak the truth, it will rather be an awakening, a coming to the consciousness that hitherto we have been sleeping. "He shall be brought to the graves, and shall watch in the heap of the dead." * O thou world round about us! and what can we possibly know of thee during our sojourning here? We raise our eyes to the stars, but who can tell us of what materials those beautiful luminaries are composed—what are the dimensions, what is the number of the fixed stars; what are the influences, what is the order of the planets? The heavens—how many, and formed of what substance—perishable or immortal? Who is it that gilds the sun? Who that silvers the moon? What father was it who begat the winds, that boisterous family? Who allows them liberty? Who places them under confinement? Who lashes them into fury? Who composes them to peace? Whence is it that the clouds hang suspended in the air, in spite of that enormous burden of waters they contain? What fire is that which causes in the lightning effects so prodigious? Who folds up the snow in such delicate white flakes? Who rolls the hail into such hard, rounded morsels? What pencil imparted those lovely tints to the rainbow, the beautiful harbinger of peace, or whence its varying beams of light? And as to so many other miracles of nature, apply to them what I have said of these.

* Job xxi. 26.

Say it of the springs, that have their birth on the loftiest eminences; of the sea, that is restrained by the puniest sands; of the metals that are formed within the bowels of the deep-sunk rocks; of the minerals, of the plants, of the medicinal herbs, of the savage beasts, of men, of devils, and of those spiritual intelligences so far removed from us. It is quite true that we profess some degree of knowledge concerning these things, as is testified by the Apostle: "Now we know in part."* But this is the very trial appointed to us in this world—that we *know in part*. It were less pain to us to know nothing at all; but to know just enough to excite, but not enough to satisfy our desires—this is something to torment us. What, therefore, will our joy and rapture be when, disencumbered of the mortal body, we shall open our eyes, clear our vision, behold every object, and in a moment of time find ourselves made perfect in all wisdom and science, so as far to surpass the most celebrated philosophers the world ever produced? How does this strike you? What have you now to say? Is it not in your opinion well worth dying, in order to obtain by dying such blessings as these?

Seneca gives us an account of a certain philosopher, Caius Junius by name, how that, when he received the sentence of death, he was quite transported with joy, because, as he said, he should very soon be satisfied in his mind touching the mighty secret then so much discussed in every academy—namely, the immortality of the soul. A Homer died from sheer mortification at his not knowing how to solve an enigma proposed to him by some poor fishermen. A Philetas died from mere regret at his not knowing how to unriddle a sophism proposed to him by some would-be philosopher. And it is reported of an Aristotle that, not

* 1 Cor. xiii. 9.

knowing how to trace the cause of the currents in the Euripus, he desperately threw himself into its rapids, and cried out, "*Quoniam Aristoteles non capit Euripum, Euripus capit Aristotelem.*" To such a degree has a single truth, when not understood, appeared in the minds of other men to be more intolerable than death. How, then, can this same death appear to us so great a hardship, when we shall be indebted to it for the clear discovery, not of one single truth, but of truths without number, all of them so unheard of, so sublime, so transcendent ?

9. I am, however, far from proposing this consideration as your chief motive and inducement to shake off quickly the trammels of this life. No, sirs ; I wish your special motive to be a desire to see God. Ah ! my dear Christians, who would believe it ? A God on His throne of Glory is now waiting to unveil before us the beauty of His countenance, to admit us into a share of His happiness, to introduce us to the possession of His riches ; and we, who have it in our power in a short time to secure all these blessings, yet still crave delay. Oh ! our blindness ! Oh ! our infirmity ! Oh ! our meanness of spirit ! Moses had a fervent, longing desire to see the face of his Lord ; and accordingly, the opportunity of a familiar intercourse being offered him, he summoned courage, and with holy boldness and under strong emotion supplicated the Lord thus : "Show me Thy face." * And very soon, in my opinion, would he have obtained that exalted favor, but that, when he saw his petition was countersigned with that conditional clause, "Man shall not see Me and live," the venerable man all of a sudden either took fright or abated somewhat of his ardor, and felt no courage left him to persevere in his supplication. Holy Augustine, meditating on this incident, scarcely knew what to say ;

* Exod. xxxiii. 13.

and whether from a feeling of resentment or of bitter surprise at such a proof of lukewarmness, I know not, he could not help crying out: "Did it require so much to make him close with the condition, and to answer, 'Then I will die'? Shall man not see Me, and live? There is nothing so hard in this. Ah! Lord, let me die, that so I may see Thee. See Thee I will, that here I may die. Deal with me, as it pleaseth Thee, O Lord; but if, in order to seeing Thee, Thy only condition is that I must die, I am quite willing to have it so. I close with the proposal. Little shall I feel the privation of no more beholding the sun in these heavens. Fain would I close my eyes to every other perishable object of this life. Farewell, ye groves; farewell, ye gardens; farewell, ye mountains; farewell, ye seas! Is it such a mighty thing to sacrifice all desire to gaze any longer upon your attractions, if so be I may see Him who gave you your being, who imparted to you your beauty? O my God! Thee, Thee only do I desire, and without Thee nothing. With Thee I wish to be present. To Thee I long to depart; and if these mortal ties are the only impediments to my soaring above to Thy glory, why, then—what wait I for? I do not ask with the Apostle for the loosening of these ties—"I desire to be dissolved."* That takes too much time; let them be snapped asunder, or rather, for still hastier despatch, let them be cut and dissevered at a stroke. In my dying nothing can grieve me but the delay Thou hast threatened in those words, 'Thou shalt wait for me many days.'"† In such terms did the ardent zeal of Augustine express itself, after by his own experience he knew somewhat the meaning of the expression, to "see the face of God." And what do we profess in regard to ourselves? Tell me, ye Christians, what have we to say?

* Phil. i. 23.

† Oa. iii. 3.

Are you quite indisposed to accept the same condition and to close with this proposal?

It is incredible, and yet it is quite true ; so I will speak it out. People are to be found—it may be some among ourselves—who, were God to give them their option, and allow them, if so minded, still to continue in their present actual state of life, would be quite ready to forfeit heaven for ever. And is not this a prodigy of blindness or of unbelief? Oh ! wretches that we are ! What, then, should we do, supposing we were not his own dear “peculiar people,” * received into His church, nourished with His blood, supported with His life, honored with so many tokens and earnestness of His love, had our lot, on the contrary, been cast with theirs who “have no hope”? † We have committed iniquity, 'tis most true ; what then ? Is not God most ready to absolve and to forgive us ? Ah ! be well assured that His glory is prepared for us, if we will only have it. “For we are the children of saints, and look for that life which God will give to those that never change their faith from Him.” ‡ Be, then, of good cheer, my Christians ! Was a man ever known to advance reluctantly to receive the garland after the wrestle, the prize after the race, the triumph after the battle ? Are not we the people who, every day of our lives, are praying so earnestly for the coming of a heavenly kingdom : “Thy kingdom come” ? How, then, can we be so enamored of this earthly prison ? The rivers, I observe, will allow themselves no rest until such time as they have plunged into the embraces of the ocean. However flowery the vales through which they run, however rich the orchards, however delightful the gardens, no such attractions can for a moment arrest their progress. They seem, as they hasten onwards, repeatedly

* Deut. xxvi. 18.

† 1 Thess. iv. 22.

‡ Job. ii. 28.

to murmur, To the sea! to the sea! The winds are strangers to peace until they have swept over the earth. The flames are strangers to repose until they are reunited to the heavens. And shall we be slack, and speed with less impetus to our final union with God? Let it not be so, Christians. This morning we will decide the matter as St. Cyprian did. And how? Why, "with a dauntless mind, with an unshaken faith, with a determined intrepidity," let us hold ourselves in readiness for whatsoever God wills; and, "discarding every fear of death," let us forward our souls' preparation for immortality. Let us approve ourselves to be such, as the Christians, we boast ourselves to be; and, when the day of Christ's summons shall dawn upon us, let us immediately respond to the call, and "thus depart out of this world, not as from constraint and necessity, but of a willing mind." Far be it from us to rank with that class of pitiable beings into whose ears the warning voice, the intimation of death drawing nigh, must be softly whispered, for fear of distressing them. Let our Christian friends and brethren be rather on the move, and near at hand, to assist us with their prayers, and the priests to fortify our souls with the Holy Sacrament. The sight of them will not alarm us.

Consider, my dear and tenderly beloved brethren, and bear it well in your minds, that already at baptism you have renounced this evil world, and therefore, as the apostle teaches, "We have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come."* Let us joyfully entertain that messenger, who will graciously invite us to a more settled habitation, to that kingdom for which we were born, that heaven for which we were created. As long as we abide

* Heb. xiii. 14.

here, we are "absent from the Lord." * Where is the exile who is not in a breathless haste to reach his native land; who does not, during his voyage, long for favorable winds, unwearied oars, a quick passage? Our country is Paradise. Our fathers are those most holy patriarchs, those prophets, those martyrs, those apostles. How, then, is it possible we do not pant for a speedy admission into their presence? Oh! the many friends that are there waiting and expecting our arrival, secure of their own immortality, only solicitous about ours? Quick, then, quick; let us long for the earliest opportunity of enfolding them in our arms, of seeing them once more to our joy, of hearing them speak to us, of abiding with them in everlasting happiness. Blessed is death, the only thing that can induct us unto all this felicity! And blessed he who knows thee, who prizes thee, who desires thee! "Let rottenness enter into my bones and swarm under me." † Let my whole body be food for worms, and turn to dust and corruption; "that I might rest in the day of trouble"; that I may find on the day of my death, which is here called the day of trouble, the only true rest—"that I may go up to our people that are girded," ascend to meet the *people* I so dearly love, who are yonder there, ready *girded* to receive me.

THE SECOND PART.

10. It gives me pleasure to believe that the dreadful horror which the mere mention of the word death occasioned you has by this sermon been somewhat abated in your minds. What is my next desire for you? In the first place, I would have you never absent yourself, as some do, from any spiritual exercises where the subject of death is dwelt upon, under the idea of their being gloomy and of

* 2 Cor. v. 6.

† Habac. iii. 16.

disastrous omen. I would rather have you take delight in frequenting them, especially when you may thence learn how to render your death a happy event, as the method is taught in that well-known exercise called "The Good Death." I would, as a part of the same duty, recommend you to cultivate for the future a closer familiarity with death, to form the habit of consulting it—in a word, that you would be advised by it in every important matter. I mean that, whenever you have to make up your mind in any affair of moment, you would pause and reflect whether the course you decide upon would be likely to give you satisfaction on your death-bed; if so, do it; but should it appear otherwise, do it not. "Do nothing," it is written, "without counsel, and thou shalt not repent when thou hast done."* But how in all the world can we ever find a thoroughly trustworthy adviser continually at our elbows? Here he is, here he is—advise with death. "O death! thy sentence is welcome!"† declares the son of Sirach. None can pass a better judgment than death—a judgment more to the point, more certain, more judicious. And, therefore, so long as we keep following it, we are in no danger whatever of being deceived. After acting, we shall not have to repent.

Probably there are few here who have not, at some time or other of their lives, witnessed a death-bed; who have not performed the last solemn offices for a mother, a father, a wife. Well. Have you been led to remark what their opinions were at that final hour? What gave them satisfaction? What caused them remorse? What were they then disposed either to commend or to censure? Did you pay attention, you must easily have perceived that, when they were dying, their judgments widely differed from what

* Ecclus. xxxii. 24.

† Ecclus. xii. 3.

they thought in the days of their health ; insomuch that to all appearance our state would resemble that of the mole, which, if naturalists say true, being blind during all its life, comes at last, when dying, to open its eyes. And, really, who is not surprised to mark the change that men's principles undergo at that crisis, how their tastes alter ? Their wishes are no longer the same as they used to be. What once pained now pleases them ; what once pleased now gives them pain. The man who before drove away the poor from his gate, now shelters them ; he who before avoided the presence of the priests, now calls for them ; he who before despised the sacraments, now asks for them ; he who before could not endure any religious conversation, now desires for it. Every one, at his death, would fain have given more diligence in the discharge of his duties, and lived a life of more strict self-denial. Behold, then, what is meant by taking death to be your adviser in every action of your life. It is for us well to consider what most persons, on coming to die, would wish they had done, and then, while we are still alive and in health, to go and do the same thing.

And allow me this morning to put before you the example of a very illustrious personage, since you yourselves being for the most part persons of distinction, you will be the more interested in so splendid an example.

11. Louis the Fat, King of France, had been on the whole a most praiseworthy monarch ; but having, either for military or domestic reasons, persecuted several very zealous bishops, he was sharply reprehended for it by St. Bernard. When subsequently he found himself in danger of death, he wished to leave behind him a record of what the feelings even of the great are at that awful hour ; and, therefore, in the first place, he desired to change his royal robes for a religious habit ; and he made a firm determina-

tion to enter, in case of his recovery, into the order of St. Benedict, the usual refuge of penitent princes. But it is a common calamity that the good which one will not perform when one can, becomes impossible when one will. He, therefore, not recovering his health, resigned himself to suffer patiently, at least, the pains of his disease. It was a long one; and his most frequent practices during it were confession and prayer. At last, being about to receive the Viaticum, he rose, though weakened and exhausted by his malady, and putting on his royal garments, he went out to the grand hall. The barons of the kingdom were there, and among them his son Louis. Turning to him with a countenance dignified but devout, he said, "See, my son, to what even kings must come. I have lived many years, gained many battles, and much wealth. What remains to me now of all this greatness? Be assured, I should be much better satisfied if I had, as I had proposed, left my kingdom before my kingdom left me. Learn, at least, the lesson from your father not to possess it with too great attachment. I resign it from henceforth to you, not to give you a great treasure, but to relieve myself from a great burden. And if this little anticipation of my renouncement can deserve any return of gratitude, I ask only this, that you will endeavor, by the holiness of your reign, to atone for your father's sins. Protect the church, love the poor, help the orphans. I shall pass what remains to me of life in penitence and tears, asking only pardon as a man from God for the poor service which I have given Him; from you, as your father, pardon for the bad example which I have given you; from my subjects, as their king, pardon for the defects of my government." The bystanders could not at these last words restrain their tears. The king himself, alone calm, drawing the ring from his finger gave it to his son,

who had been at first amazed, and now was overcome with tenderness. He then made a public donation of his personal property to the churches and monasteries. He also took from the rooms of the palace the pictures, hangings, and all the sumptuous furniture, to be sold for the benefit of the poor, not even sparing his own royal robes. And he never was more cheerful than when, at last, in presence of his God, he was able to see himself poor, barefooted, and almost naked. Kneeling, and with the deepest humility, he made his profession of the holy Catholic faith, after which he received the Blessed Sacrament from the hands of the priest. Having communicated, he seemed to receive new strength, and, returning unassisted to his room, refusing all marks of respect and special services, he lay upon his hard mattress like a poor lay-brother. The one who gives us this account says that seeing the king reduced from so lofty to so humble a state, he could not restrain his tears. The king, however, gently remonstrated with him, saying, "Do not, my dear friend, weep for this, which ought to make you glad. What greater happiness can I have than to meet death calmly in this guise, unburdened and detached from the world?" He remained in this state for some time, suffering still from his long and painful disease; and when he saw that his last moment was at hand, he called his servants, and had a large mat put on the floor, and a cross formed upon it with ashes. Finally, being placed upon it, he breathed forth his soul to heaven, as we may hope, in affectionate colloquies with his Crucifix, and accompanied by the sighs and fervent prayers of his friends and the assistant priests.

12. Can you suppose that, when you come to die, things will appear to you in a light different from that in which other dying people have seen them? Do you think that

the fact of your having found pleasure in a life of strict temperance will be in the hour of death a joy to you? Why, then, do you now multiply your debaucheries? Will it in that hour be a joy to you that you so regularly attended church? Why, then, will **you** now always be at the club and casino? Will your past love of retirement in that hour be a joy to you? Why, then, all this longing impatience to have more liberty? If you will in that hour have cause to congratulate yourself on your devotedness to religion, why, then, do you now have such a mean opinion of its followers? You know very well that all this heathenish delight you now take in dress will at death sit heavy on your soul; and why, then, not be more sober-minded?—all this pride and haughtiness; and why not be humble?—all this impudence in jesting; and why not correct it?—all this rancor in bearing hatred; and why not subdue it?—all this fraud in legal contracts; and why not have done with it? Come, then, all of you, this morning, and take home that most trustworthy adviser, to whose care I now consign you; in other words, let every one of you seriously consider how, in the hour of his death, he would wish he had once acted; and let him decide upon **so acting now.** “**O Death! thy sentence is welcome.**”

SERMON IX.

ON THE LOVE OF GOD IN AFFLICTING US.

"Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick."—ST. JOHN XI. 3.

1. No one will deny the great difficulty there is in dissembling any strong emotion of our minds; but, if I mistake not, this difficulty is nowhere so much experienced as in the case of love. Would you have an instance of hatred concealed under the mask of kindness? Look at Cain inviting Abel to take a pleasant walk. Would you see sorrow hidden under a show of joy? Look at Jezabel on the balcony waiting for Jehu. Would you see envy, hatred, bitterness, and rancor disguised under a sham of religion? Look at Herod hypocritically enquiring after Christ, that he might go with the Magi to worship Him. But, in regard to love, who was ever acquainted with a method of hiding it in such a manner as to make the person who is really in love look like an implacable enemy? Nor ought the fact to surprise us. Should a grown-up person wish to screen himself from the persecutions of the court, he knows how to hit upon a place of concealment, to assume a new name, to put on an altered appearance, as David, when a fugitive from the presence of Saul. But this, in the case of a little child, is not so easily accomplished. So far from knowing how to hide itself, the child, on the contrary, will be the very first to run and meet the persons who are in search of it. And do not we all know that love would

pass itself off as being a child ; yea, more, a child bearing a torch in its hand. Only conceive, then, whether it can be possible for it long to remain in concealment, going about, as it does, with a lighted torch. "The lamps thereof are fire and flames"; * *not only fire*, which under the ashes might half die away, but *flames*.

But what am I designing this morning, my hearers, by such an exordium? I will explain. It would appear that Christ's object here was to dissemble for once the exceeding love He felt for His friend Lazarus, and in order to this He allowed Him to fall sick and to pine even unto death. But, think you that an object of this kind was attainable even by our Lord? By no means. The two sisters had penetration enough to discover that Lazarus was not at all the less possessed of His love on account of this circumstance; and therefore they did not hesitate to send Him this rather bold message: "Behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick"; not he whom Thou *didst* love before, but he whom Thou *lovest* now. And, accordingly, we observe that, when our Lord reached the grave of His dear friend, He could no longer repress His tears, but troubled Himself and betrayed His feelings of intense sorrow. "He groaned in the spirit and troubled Himself"; insomuch that the bystanders, one and all, could not but admire the ardor of His love. What, then, my afflicted ones, have you to say to this incident? Speak. Can it be possible—are you the only persons in the world who cannot detect in your sufferings that most exquisite love which God entertains towards you? Ah! be it not so. Believe me, God does not love you at all the less because He afflicts you; but rather, His love is the greater on account of this very circumstance, though at present you may not understand it. Receive, therefore,

* Cant. viii. 6.

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with a willing mind my word of exhortation, when I call upon you to bear every trial He sends you with a patient resignation to His will, blessing and praising Him who by such trials declares Himself to be your best Benefactor. Let every afflicted soul give good heed to the comfort I have now for it, and endeavor to turn it to the utmost advantage.

2. To trace this comfort to its original source—were we to regard the tribulations appointed you by God not as being designed for your benefit, but for His own gratification and pleasure ; still, in spite of this, it is clear that no ordinary relief will arise from the consideration that He who appoints your trials is God. “As it hath pleased the Lord, so is it done.”* And what calamity is there which we ought not cheerfully to welcome, when coming from a hand like His ?

I know not whether you have chanced to notice what sometimes occurs in some of the cities of Lombardy, with its wintry climate, especially during the gay and licentious season of the carnival. A smart, handsomely dressed young cavalier may happen to walk through the streets, so entirely wrapped up in himself as to annoy no one else, pluming himself, it may be, on his fine auburn hair, as it gently flaps his shoulders, on his elegant costume, on his general style and appearance full in the fashion ; when, all of a sudden, he is surprised by a blow on his back from a huge snowball, which has the effect, amid the laughter of all the bystanders, of powdering the upper part of his cloak, his flowing ringlets, and the superb scarlet lining the hood of which he was so proud. The rage he flies into at an insult like this is something indescribable, and it increases tenfold from his not knowing the quarter whence

* Job i. 21.

the blow came. His countenance reddens with fiery indignation, he looks angrily about him, and is on the point of drawing his sword to avenge himself on any person, whosoever he be, whom he may suspect to be the cause of his public exposure. But in the act of looking up, he discovers that the blow was inflicted by the hand of a fair lady, upon which he not only immediately calms down and relents, but composing his countenance pays his respects to her with a gentle smile and a most lowly, courteous bow ; nor, at the same hour on the very next day, does he fail to pass under her window, aspiring to some repetition of a similar favor. Now, my brethren, I cannot account for it why one is not to pay that homage to God which one does to a lady, only because she is a lady. You feel sore aggrieved because you sometimes receive a blow unawares, as from some huge snowball, doing you an injury when you least expect it ; because your son dies, because your business fails, because your employment is wrested from you, because some public disgrace overtakes you. Oh ! do but just look up, and see who it is that smites you. Is it not the Lord ? Cheer up, then, and compose your mind ; for from such a hand, if you will mark it well, every injury is a favor ; as St. Augustine said, "It is a pain, and yet a grace."

3. But you would most seriously err did you encourage the notion that God, in putting you to this pain, designs His own pleasure and gratification. Not so, not so, my hearers. "He is not delighted in our being lost."* This highly deserves our attention, as we read it in the book of Tobias. Settle it, then, in your minds that He has no other aim and object in view than your advantage alone ; or should there, after all, be some regard to His own in-

* Tob. iii. 22.

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terest in treating you thus, it can only be that of a tender, loving heart, desirous that you should remember Him, apply to Him for help, admire Him in all His ways. But how can this be? you will say. Can suffering ever be the right method of drawing us to God? Why, it is a fact to the contrary that the ash-tree does not possess so much power to drive away the serpent, nor the smoke to drive away the wasps, nor the fire to drive away the lion, as suffering possesses to scare and drive away man, a being so devoted by nature to pleasure. If God, then, would facilitate our attachment to Him, let Him not send us adversity, but prosperity; let Him fondle, and not frighten us. Ah! my brethren, what a folly is this in your prescribing laws to the Almighty! Hear His own declaration by Jeremias: "I will give my fear in their heart, that they may not revolt from me."* To prevent men from departing from me, what shall I do? Shall I flatter them? Shall I coax them? Shall I caress them? Alas! they would soon prove so ungrateful as to turn their backs upon me. What means, then, must I take "that they may not revolt from me"? I will terrify them; "I will give my fear in their hearts." Because, granting it to be quite true that they will then fly from my presence to secure some shelter, yet whither can they go for that shelter except to me? "In their affliction, they rise early to me."†

4. And, in truth, were our affairs in life always prosperous, had we nothing at any period either to depress us with sorrow or to disturb us with fear, when, my hearers, when should we—I say not, have recourse to God—but when should we ever bestow on Him the least thought or any consideration whatever?

Have you forgotten how the disciples of Jesus behaved

* Jer. xxiii. 40.

† Os. v. 12.

when they once took ship with Him? As long as the sea continued calm, He was so entirely out of their minds that they allowed Him all alone to go to sleep on a pillow. When, however, was it that they really did apply to Him, anxiously crowded about Him, vehemently implored His assistance? "A great tempest arose in the sea." * It was when they saw the water about them suddenly swelling, and the heavens all over them getting black, when they observed the sun unexpectedly withdrawn from their eyes, the hurricanes raging, the thunders bellowing aloud, the billows running mountains high, the torrents of rain descending, and their vessel, all but swallowed by the waves, on the brink of utter demolition; oh! then, at that crisis it was that they all began to cry for mercy: "Lord, save us, we perish!" "Conceive now," says St. Augustine, "the same thing happening every day among us Christians." Were God to cease to interfere, were He never to intermix troubles with the enjoyments of time, we should very soon forget Him. Were we always in a calm, always with fine weather, always in a state of prosperity, oh! how entirely would God be out of our minds! What is it that induces us to apply to Him? A contrary wind, a peril, a reverse. "But when the anguish caused by afflictions stirs up a tempest in our minds, then our faith, which was before asleep, awakens."

In proof of this assertion, if ever you engaged in any important religious undertaking, tell me, sirs, what time did you do it? Was it not, when in want of an heir to your property, you desired of Heaven the gift and blessing of a child? If ever you gave away a munificent sum in charity, when was it? Was it not when, laid low on a sick bed, you desired of Heaven a reprieve from death? If ever you

* St. Matt. viii. 24.

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offered a fervent prayer, when was it? Was it not when, suffering from evil tongues, you desired of Heaven a deliverance from infamy? Hence, I might almost say, it fares with ourselves as it does with the element of water. To force water to mount upwards, what method are we to adopt? Must we allow it to spatiate leisurely over the flowing plains—allow it full liberty and plenty of room? In that case, it will invariably rather sneak down into some lower level; there it will stagnate into a pond, there it will putrefy in a marsh; or there it will run wild to empty itself in the ocean. In order to make it mount upwards, whether it will or no, you must confine it within some narrow channel or canal; you must press around it, shut it in, imprison it. It is the same with ourselves. When everything is to our liking, we do nothing but go creeping ignobly upon the earth; “like waters that return no more, we fall down into the earth.” * We stagnate as to what is good; we become corrupt in vice. Then only, on some pressure being put upon us, do we mount above; thither we soar when we find ourselves in trouble. *Isaias* thus emphatically spake of the people in his time: “Lord, they have sought after Thee in distress.” † Nor is water the only thing that illustrates what I mean. To make the strings of a musical instrument give an harmonious sound, must we not tighten them with the screw? Let them go down, and they all get out of tune. To make the branches of a spreading vine teem with thick clusters, must we not wound them with the pruning-knife? Let them remain as they are, and see how fruitless they become. That the berries of the sweet juniper may exhale a delicate odor, must we not expose them to the fire? Leave them to themselves, and see how they lose nearly all their fragrance. Nor is it otherwise with the

* *9 Kings* xiv. 24.

† *Is.* xlv. 26.

brute beasts; for observation teaches us that, when they suffer from sharp hunger, then they are more fleet on the wing, as is the eagle; then they are more swift in the chase, as is the panther; then they are more ravenous after the prey, as are the wolves. If God, therefore, as the Author of nature, can produce such marked effects upon irrational animals by means of subjecting them to some pain, is it at all wonderful that He should be able, as the Author of grace, to do the same by a like process with ourselves? One in the Psalms had good reason to address Him in those words: "In Thy anger Thou shalt break the people in pieces."* Thou shalt bring them to Thyself. For what is it, as Augustine comments on the verse, "in anger to break the people in pieces," but this—"Thou shalt compass them about with tribulation, that finding themselves thus beset they may apply to Thee"?

5. The task would be endless were I to make out a complete list of the souls recovered to God in this way. "When He slew them, then they sought Him."† But—to give you a small specimen—think you that wretched prodigal son would have ever resolved to return to his father but for his forlorn condition, when, naked, dirty, starved, destitute, he was compelled to feed the filthy swine, or, rather, instead of feeding them, to feed himself by pilfering their vile relics. "I perish with hunger"—this it was that extorted from his mouth his "I will go to my father."‡ It is a fact that Manasses, after the most daring impiety, was induced to re-establish the law of the true God, and to restore His worship; but this was owing to those degrading fetters that so long had weighed him to the ground. It is a fact that Antiochus, after the most atrocious rebellion, was led to desire peace with the true God and to proclaim

* Ps. lv. 8.

† Ps. lxxvii. 34.

‡ St. Luke xv. 17, 18.

His honor; but this was owing to those dreadful worms, that so angrily gnawed his flesh. And holy David—what was the account he gave of himself? He acknowledged that, if at any time with true earnestness of heart he sought the Lord, it was in his days of trouble: “In the day of my trouble, I sought God.”* Whereas, in his days of sunshine (oh! his exceeding guilt and wickedness!), he sat on his house-top contemplating the charms of Bethsabee. We must all, then, allow that affliction does help to bring us again to God; if we cannot make up our minds to say further with St. Gregory, that it does more than help, that it forces and constrains us. “The evils that oppress us compel us to apply to God.”

6. This fact, however, should cause no surprise, when we observe how affliction is the very circumstance which, in spite of ourselves, renders us, as Ecclesiasticus remarked, more reasonable in our opinions, more meek in our conversation, more discreet in our general behavior. “A grievous sickness maketh the soul sober.”† Among all the voracious birds that scour the air, the falcon is said to be the most imperious and intolerant. And yet we see this bird reduced to such abject submission that the fowler has only to whistle, and it will light on his shoulder, jump on his hand, and even, when the prey is just within its grasp, sometimes drop it untouched, sooner than not obey the voice that bids it retreat. But from whence comes it that this formidable bird, naturally so stubborn and haughty, should, through a certain discipline, become all docility and obedience? Ælian tells us a very pleasant story about it. He says that by far the easiest way to tame the falcon is to confine him for a few days near the smoky furnace of a blacksmith’s shop; for at the sight of the surrounding flames, the

* Ps. lxxvi. 3.

Ecclesi. xxxi. 2.

thundering noise of the hammers and of the resounding anvil, he conceives such a feeling of dire consternation that he at once lays aside his natural lofty spirit. This fact I cannot certify from my own experience; but this I know well, that among ourselves there is no readier method of subduing a naturally proud temper, and of moulding it into humility and submissiveness, than by casting it into the furnace of tribulation—"In the furnace of humiliation." * Only expose a temper like this to the terrific noise of those sledge-hammers of the Almighty, as they bear down upon us, and no doubt, says Isaias, it will soon surrender. "Vexation alone shall make you understand what you hear." †

That self conceit and vanity have often led people to do the most grossly absurd things is quite undeniable. Xerxes, the Persian emperor, rated himself so highly that he believed he had power to enchain the sea. Pronouncing the sea guilty of high treason because it had dashed into pieces a certain bridge he had constructed on the Hellespont, he had it flogged by the public executioner, and threatened to serve it worse the next time, should it disregard its master. Clearchus, Lord of Heraclea, must needs have an eagle, armed with fiery arrows, carried constantly before him, as though he had been Jupiter. Antigonus, Lord of Macedon, must needs have a thirsus, intertwined with green vine-leaves, paraded before him, as though he had been Bacchus. What shall I say of Heliogabalus, who had his chariot drawn by lions, that when seated in it he might be taken for Cybele, the mother of the gods. But Caligula exceeded them all in his outrageous folly, for he was not satisfied with going about dressed now as Mars, now as Pluto, now as Pallas, now as Saturn, and to receive in such attire the homage of the priests, but he must needs cut off the heads

* Eccl. ii. 5.

† Isa. xxviii. 19.

of the statues of all the deities then worshipped at **Rome**, and then have a likeness of himself placed in their stead. He stormed, thundered, and lightened, by means of a certain framework he had contrived for that purpose ; and setting up, simpleton as he was, to lord it over the stars, he threatened Jupiter—whom he yet acknowledged to be the chief of all the gods—that he would banish him from the city, and strip him of all the court and homage the people paid him, merely because, by a vexatious shower of rain, he had once presumed to interrupt the public games.

But I want information as to the precise time when it was that these madmen launched out into such stupendous follies. Was it when they perceived themselves to be in any distress or calamity ? Certainly not. It was in their prosperous days, when they flattered themselves that fortune was at their back, that they had managed to put a drag upon her wheel, and to take the wind out of her sail. I don't think you will meet with an instance of a single person who, when overtaken by adversity, did not abate somewhat of his pride and arrogance. So it was with **Alexander**. Wounded in battle, he knew himself to be but a man when he saw the blood copiously streaming from his veins, as **Plutarch** relates of him. And so it was with **Herod**. Struck by an angel, he allowed himself to be a mere mortal when he felt the worms cruelly preying upon his entrails, as **Josephus** records.

Now, if affliction could succeed in bringing such reckless characters as these to their senses, we must surely conclude that it will prove far more effectual in the case of those who are tractable and much less inclined to folly. When **David** would have certain persons about him brought to some consciousness of their over-weening presumption, he offered this prayer, " Appoint, O Lord ! a lawgiver over them," or, as

others read it, "a teacher, that the Gentiles may know themselves to be but man." * Yes, Lord, do provide them some master, who shall teach them to act in their proper character as *men*. But who shall this master be? Who shall engage in a task so difficult? Who shall persuade them of a truth they so much dislike? Why, affliction must do it; nay, the mere apprehension of affliction will be a master for them. "Appoint, O Lord! fear over them," so Jerome translated the verse; "Appoint, O Lord, terror over them," so the Chaldee Paraphrase. But St. John Chrysostom more directly applied the same title, when he calls affliction "our schoolmaster," the schoolmaster who teaches us how to act in character. See the truth of this demonstrated in the beautiful picture he places before us in one of his Homilies to the people.

7. Take the case of a distinguished young man, who, having formed to his perfect satisfaction a most desirable family connection, is now conducting home his young, noble, wealthy, modest, and lovely bride. The near relations on both sides are invited to the splendid nuptial festivity; and the young couple are seen walking to and fro among the guests with all the joyous hilarity usual in high life on such occasions. Come, now, says the holy man, let us visit for a while this scene of so much happiness. What do we find there? Riotous laughter, licentious conversation, disorderly conduct; one is surfeited with his gluttony, another is stupefied with his drunkenness. We see vanity in their modes of dress, luxury and ostentation in all and everything about them; games, concerts, dances, intrigues, effemina-cies, uproar, and turmoil on every side; and, in all this babble of tongues, not one single word reaches the ear which has the remotest tendency to what is good—"a vast torrent

* Ps. ix. 21.

of words, but nothing morally, nothing intellectually good." Now, what comes next? After the interval of a few days, by some deplorable stroke the bride dies, cut down in the full bloom of her loveliness and beauty. The same mansion which was a few days ago the scene of mirth and merriment consequently now becomes the abode of mourning and misery. Let us go, then, if not too painful, and pay it a second visit. Oh! what an alteration is here! As we approach the grand entrance, not a single sound of any kind is to be heard. There is the most profound silence, stillness, and order pervading everywhere. We ascend the staircase; and, behold, the domestics make their appearance in neglected apparel, with eyes fixed on the ground, with clouded expressions of thoughtfulness, with voices sunk and subdued. If we accompany them into the rooms, we find them stripped bare to the very walls of every meretricious decoration. There is about everything a look of decorum. The glad sounds of the different musical instruments have entirely ceased; and no attention is paid even to the stakes left all in confusion on the gaming-table. Where do we see a single face wearing a smile? If any speak, words more serious, sentiments more just, expressions of a more edifying tendency, can nowhere be heard. Not only the more thoughtful, but even the young maidens, even the common servants, find themselves, all of a sudden, turned into philosophers, as they exchange one with another the most rare and wisest of maxims. One remarks that human life is really nothing but a mere dream, an outward show, a transitory pageant. One expresses astonishment that people can ever idolize so fondly female charms, which, though they blaze and dazzle for a time, yet go out like a lamp, and leave nothing behind but what is disgusting. Another observes in reply that our duty calls us to be in constant ex-

pectation of that hour of death, which spares neither distinctions of birth, nor grandeur of wealth, nor the prime of life; and while they pursue the subject in this manner, one hears nothing, St. Chrysostom says, but what is good, profitable, and savoring of genuine repentance. Our true teacher is affliction; much does it increase the wisdom of men.

To return from this digression, we have now no cause to feel surprised if we hear David supplicating in behalf of those who have not yet known the true ends of life, that affliction should be sent to teach them—"Appoint, O Lord! fear and terror over them, that the Gentiles may know themselves to be but men." This causes the proud to humble themselves, the licentious to submit to discipline, the riotous to become orderly, the obstinate tractable, and disposes the rebellious against God in general to repent and to return to Him. "Under tribulation all our passions give way; envy, jealousy, concupiscence, pride of riches, carnal sensuality, arrogance, superciliousness, anger, and the whole swarm of vices." Thus far St. Chrysostom in his eloquent and mighty vein of gold.

8. This point now being settled, are we not, sirs, think you, vastly indebted to God for the afflictions He sends us? Oh! how great, how very great is our obligation! Mark well in this the confirmation of His own endearing words spoken by the mouth of Jeremias. Listen, listen to them; for they are indeed divine: "Behold, I frame evil against you."* Could He have expressed Himself better? When He afflicts, He seems to be hurting us: but not so; He "frames (feigns) evil." Never in reality does He show us greater favor. Oh! what signal grace! Oh! what overflowing goodness! "Count it all joy, when you shall

* Jer. xviii. 11.

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fall into divers temptations";* so St. James exhorts. And what higher favor than to impose on us a necessity of becoming good, of being devout, of being made worthy of His glory? Are not we the very persons who so often beseech Him to draw unto Himself our wills, however obstinate they be, that he would force and impel them? "Be favorable, and constrain our rebellious desires to serve Thee." Now, this is the very thing He does by afflicting us. And how can we, then, no sooner see the bit, than, like horses not yet broken in, we begin to turn restive, and would be backing, resisting, and not allowing Him to tame us? Ah! be persuaded that affliction is our way to Heaven. We must suffer, ay, repeatedly suffer; "The reproofs of instruction are the way of life."† I am far from maintaining that this way is not a most trying, difficult, and laborious one; but it is also the most safe and secure.

9. Prudent people agree in thinking that, when one can accomplish a distant journey either by sea or land, the more judicious course is to prefer the latter. But is not, then, a voyage by sea far more convenient? St. Bernard will answer you in the affirmative, and tell you there can be no question about it. You embark in a fine vessel handsomely gilt, and with a joyous bevy of passengers, who make a holiday of it every day. You entertain yourself with them in conversation; you have music, singing, and dancing on board; and, for all this, you do not lose a moment's progress towards your journey's end. Whether you are sitting, or reclining, or fast asleep, you still make way; and oh! the quick passage you have when the wind blows directly in your favor! You sport and amuse yourself with the sailors, who, toiling and bustling about in a state approaching to nudity, never fail to suggest some ludicrous

* St. James i. 2.

† Prov. vi. 23.

idea to your mind. You acquaint yourself with all their technical terms and sea phrases—a collection truly marvellous. And then, in regard to the weather, whatever it is, it can't harm you. Should it rain, you shelter yourself under the awning; should it snow, you take your seat close to the fire; under the shade cast by the stern, you escape the hot sun and fan yourself cool; and, which is the strangest thing of all, at a very trifling expense you may sometimes easily accomplish a most distant voyage. But, on the other hand, to travel by the land—oh! the expense, the annoyances, the difficulties of it! In the winter your feet are clogged with lumps of mud; in the summer you are stifled and suffocated with dust; there are steep ascents, rapid declines, flooded plains, which you must get over—no rest by day, no sleep by night. You have to put up with horses to your carriage but half broken in, who will shake the very life out of you; and then the dirty inns, and the incivility of the people who keep them, and I know not what besides. In spite of all these hardships, I, who have tried both these methods of travelling, deliberately set my seal to the wisdom of that common proverb, which advises us to “praise the sea, but to stick close to the land.” And for why? For the very reason adduced by St. Bernard: “The way over towering hills and rugged rocks may seem the more laborious; but they who have tried it have found it the safer.” The road by land is unquestionably more fatiguing; but then you have the advantage of having firm and solid ground under your feet; with no death to frighten you on every side, as is the case on the sea, where every curl of the waves, every agitation of the air, makes you suspect that the winds, hitherto your kind friends, are preparing a revolt against you. Now consider this to be precisely what occurs in our case. One

can reach Heaven by two modes of travelling; this is certain—by the way of prosperity, or by the way of adversity. The way leading to it by prosperity is the most convenient; that leading by adversity is the most safe. Almost all who are now safely arrived in Heaven have come by this last. “All that have pleased God passed through many tribulations, remaining faithful.”* So spake Judith. The Patriarchs, the Apostles, the Prophets, and whosoever else among men was most beloved of God, travelled this way—“all that pleased Him,” without any exception; whereas they who passed with their crowded sails over the other have, alas! most of them split on some rock, or foundered on some sand-bank, and so suffered shipwreck. “The prosperity of fools shall destroy them.”† Solomon asserted this, and proved himself how true it is.

10. I must confess to you, my hearers, that I feel my blood run cold whenever I read that place in Scripture where the angel said to the venerable Tobias: “Because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee.”‡ Because thou didst engage in so many labors of love, because thou didst snatch the bread out of thine own mouth to give it to the poor, because thou didst banish sleep from thine own eyes to go and bury the dead; in a word, because thou wast beloved of the Lord, it was necessary—what? necessary that thou shouldst lose thy sight, that thou shouldst be plunged into the utmost misery, that thou shouldst have to contend with extreme destitution? “Because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee.” What, then, I ask myself, will ever become of me, a poor sinner, if days without a cloud are perpetually shining over my head, if none of my wishes are ever thwarted, but all

* Jud. viii. 23.

† Prov. i. 32.

‡ Tobias xii. 23.

crowned with success? O my God! I have good cause to fear that Thou takest little or no pleasure in me while Thou keepest back Thy hand from smiting and correcting me! "He that spareth his rod hateth his son." * There is no uncertainty in those proofs from Scripture by which God has convinced me that the afflictions we suffer bespeak the love He bears us. I consult the Book of Machabees; and what does its author tell me? "It is a token of great goodness when sinners are not suffered to go on in their ways for a long time, but are presently punished." † I consult Solomon, and what does he testify? "Whom the Lord loveth he chastiseth." ‡ I consult Paul, and what does he affirm? "Whom the Lord loveth He chastiseth." § I consult Job, and what does he reply? "Blessed is the man whom God correcteth." || I carry on my enquiry to the Acts of the Apostles, and what is their unanimous answer? "Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God." ¶ Convinced, overwhelmed, confounded by so many evidences, I cannot but tremble and quake for myself, wretched man that I am, when I thus see myself given over entirely to my own devices; God keeping back the rod, refusing to chastise me, and leaving me to myself alone. "If you be without chastisement" (oh! the fearful denunciation hurled by the apostle on those who put the day of tribulation far from them), "if you be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then"—I can scarcely finish the sentence, it so alarms me—"then are you bastards, and not sons." ** Ah! no, not so, my one Supreme Good; for I am firmly resolved to be one of Thy true sons. It must be so, it must be so. And to this end I readily offer myself to Thy

* Prov. xiii. 24.

† 2 Mach. vi. 13.

‡ Prov. iii. 12.

§ Heb. xii. 6.

|| Job v. 17.

¶ Acts xiv. 22.

** Heb. xii. 8.

chastening hand: "I am ready for scourges." * Choose the kind of rod that seemeth Thee best; the choice is no affair of mine. Hence I do not say I am ready for the *scourge*; but I say for the *scourges*. My rebellious, sensitive frame shrinks indeed at the thought of the mortifications it may be called to—those sicknesses with which Thou canst distress me in my person; those reproaches with which Thou canst degrade me in my character; those bitternesses with which Thou canst turn my pleasures into gall. But what of this? Will it not, under every circumstance, be a source of abundant consolation that I am able to turn and to behold Thee on Thy cross dying for me? And where is the cup that can ever be presented to me, however nauseous, out of which Thou hast not drunk the far greater portion before me?—Thou, an outcast; Thou, despised; Thou, calumniated for the most praiseworthy deeds; Thou, betrayed by Thy friends; Thou, persecuted by Thine enemies; Thou, summoned to the seat of judgment as a malefactor; Thou, trampled down by injustice; Thou, jeered at by insolence; Thou, borne down by brutality; Thou, all wounds in Thy body, all anguish in Thy soul; Thou, in the prime of Thy days dragged to death; Thou, sentenced, crucified, and publicly exposed to shame between two thieves! Were I robbed of every other consolation but a sight of Thee, whom my soul loveth, how rich should I still remain! Yet, notwithstanding my worst fears, I know that Thou wilt deal with me in tender compassion; for if Thou shouldest reach forth indeed Thine own cup to my lips, it does not therefore follow that Thy will would have me also drain it to the very dregs. Can I have a doubt on this matter? It is quite true that, as if it pleased Thee to terrify us, Thou didst once say, "Can you drink the chalice

* Ps. xxxvii. 22.

that I shall drink?"* But, pardon me, Thou oughtest rather to have said *of the chalice*, not *the chalice* absolutely; for where is the man who has ever drunk the whole of its contents? At best, Thou to other men allowest no more than a single taste. But, as for me, of this I am confident, that whatever trials Thou mayest appoint unto me, all will be in proportion to the little strength I have, and therefore all inconsiderable, all few in number, all exact in weight; for "Thou wilt give us for our drink tears in measure."† For all Thy dispensations towards me, let Thy name be blessed for ever! Must not every event work for my advantage, as coming from Thee, when tribulation itself proves a blessing? Spare Thyself, then, all trouble in putting on a show and semblance of hatred against me in these tribulations. I have found Thee out. What, after all, is the true character of any tribulation whatsoever, as it comes from Thy hands? It is all love, only under the disguise of hatred.

THE SECOND PART.

II. It would highly become me, as the conclusion of this discourse, were I to appear in a cause no less illustrious than that of defending God; defending Him, I mean, from the charge which is so often brought against Him—namely, that He prospers the wicked. For if we have found affliction to be so signal a token of the favor shown by God to His friends—His elect, those whom He has destined to glory—what wonder, as the converse to this, should He allow the wicked to be prosperous? The reason for His so doing is evident: He feels no love towards them. "The sinner hath provoked the Lord; according

* St. Matt. xx. 22.

† Ps. lxxix. 6.

to the multitude of His wrath He will not seek him.”* But, on second thoughts, I see quite clearly that the charge and complaint of these people against God is utterly groundless; because my belief is that, search where they will, they will never meet with any wicked person who was truly happy. They will be able, I fully admit, to find a wicked man rolling in wealth, dazzling the world with splendid titles of honor—a man courted by fawning hangers-on, who gives himself airs, who can live in the most expensive style, who can entertain sumptuously, who can “spend his days in wealth;”† but that he should, for any such reasons, be a happy man—this they cannot find. Ah! how very little is required to make a wicked man perfectly wretched, whosoever he be! It suffices alone that he is wicked. For a proof of this, listen:

Can you tell me, my brethren, which, in your opinion of all human afflictions, is the greatest? If I ask my aged hearers they will, for a certain, answer—death; since for some time past death has been heard importunately knocking at their doors, and they have no means of sending him away about his business. If I ask those cavaliers, they will tell me—dishonor; if these fair ladies, they will tell me—jealousy; if these overworked mechanics, they will reply that it is the cruel manner in which they are day after day defrauded of their just wages by the upper classes. To these courtiers the greatest affliction will be rivalry; to these domestics, servitude; and in like manner every individual will consider his own personal sufferings as being the severest of all. This would seem to have been thoroughly understood by that famous orator who said: “The nature of human infirmity is such that each man estimates what befalls himself to be the heaviest of all

* Ps. x. 4, Heb.

† Job xxi. 13.

calamities." And he accounted for it thus: We have nothing but an abstract knowledge of other men's sufferings; our own we sensibly experience. We speculate on theirs; we actually feel our own.

But wholly setting aside every personal feeling, let us estimate from the sound deductions of reason, rather than from the false promptings of self-love, the true magnitude of the tribulations which may befall us. We shall then heartily assent to the entire truth of what St. Augustine says in his commentary on the Psalms. It is this: "Among all the tribulations the mind of man is subject to, none can exceed a consciousness of guilt." A guilty, tormenting conscience is the greatest of all human afflictions. He shows this quite clearly from the opposite case. Put a man whose conscience is void of offence on his trial by exposing him to any of those afflictions you just considered to be the very greatest of all; he will endure them, you will see, with the utmost composure, and even at times rejoice and exult in them. For instance, expose him to certain death; you will see him go forth and welcome it with open arms. Expose him to shame, to envy, to destitution, to the sight of some successful competitor, to drudgery under some worthless master; he will evince a spirit of meekness and fortitude, yea, more, of contentedness and complacency, under all these varied tribulations. In short, place the man whose conscience is void of offence in the worst extremities imaginable, place him in hell itself, he will find the means even there of comforting his soul. His one great principle—that of conformity to the will of God—will serve to reconcile him to every state of life, and to infuse the sweet taste of ambrosia into the gall and bitterness of the worst that can befall him. St. Bernard for our learning attested this truth: "Nothing is more pleasant,

nothing more safe, than a good conscience. Let the body be worn out with pain, be emaciated with fastings, be lacerated with scourges, be distorted on the rack, be killed with the sword, be tortured with punishment, the conscience will not feel it."

On the other hand, where will the man whose conscience condemns him ever find a moment's peace? Let him amuse himself in his gardens, plunge even into the most licentious society; at every turn the wretch carries within him the full, undisguised horror of that tribunal which convicts him of rebellion against the King of kings. Must he not of necessity make himself miserable when he thinks of the glory he has forfeited, the terrors of that hell which now stares him in the face? "The wicked are like the raging sea, which cannot rest." * So Isaiah describes them. Their inward sufferings are so severe that they are utterly at a loss how to assuage them, except it be by contending against the first lessons of their early education, except it be by denying the faith, by disputing the immortality of the soul, by refusing to acknowledge either heaven or hell, by secretly turning atheists, so as to pass their days under the desperate notion that "there is no God." † But, oh! their sad, forlorn condition! For this idea alone of their being driven to such an expedient is quite enough of itself to consummate their misery. Should they ever flatter themselves that they have managed to keep their minds tolerably quiet, the most awful truths of revelation, like so many dogs roused from a short slumber, will suddenly rush upon them, and, by the fierceness of their joint attack, wring from their hearts, however callous, a confession, despite themselves, that there is a God in the world still—a God, too, such as they would fain not have Him to be. To this

* Isaiah lvii. 20.

† Ps. xlii. 1.

would succeed those shadowy midnight spectres, those hideous apparitions, that inability to take any rest, even in the sweet embraces of sleep, the soothing nurse of every other human woe. "If I say, My bed shall comfort me, and I shall be relieved speaking with myself on my couch"—these words of Job portray the sinner's utter misery—"then Thou wilt frighten me with dreams and terrify me with visions." *

For we must never believe, my brethren, that furies, such as we see represented on the stage at our theatres, ever break loose from the abyss of hell, with their flaming torches and their knotted snakes, in order to scourge ungodly men. No, sirs, it is their own guilt, it is their own conscience, that hews them in pieces. Those visions, the dark creation of their own minds, those deep-drawn sighs, those sudden starts and shudders—these are the household furies of all wicked doers. How, then, can you pronounce any of their number to be happy? "They spend their days in good things." No doubt they do. They spend them in sporting, they spend them in dancing, they spend them in tilts and tournaments, they spend them in revelry, they spend them in such like frivolous pastimes. But it is one thing to *spend* one's days *in good things*, and quite another to *spend good days*. Never can it be said of them with any truth that the days they spend are happy and prosperous.

And so all my labor among you to-day would have been quite uncalled for, if I had undertaken to justify the happiness of wicked men, because, for a certainty, never once in their lives are they happy. Their outside appearance is all deception; it may be compared to a made-up female beauty, anxious with her painted cheeks to obtain admiration, and to look well at a distance; inspect her more nearly,

* Job vii. 13, 14.

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she will disgust instead of surprise you. This is not solid, substantial happiness; it is a mere layer upon the surface, and a very thin layer too. Believe this on the credit of Seneca, a wise heathen, and conclude with him that "no wickedness, however fortune may deck it out with her favors, will go unpunished, for the punishment of sin consists in our having committed it." This being now proved, let us shut up our discourse in this way. Tribulation falls to the lot of all wicked persons, and perhaps it more severely afflicts them than it does the righteous; but here is the great difference—the tribulations of the righteous are a pledge of an everlasting reward, those of the wicked are an earnest of an everlasting punishment. For it happens to them as it did formerly to the infamous people of Sodom, whose suffering by a conflagration in this world by no means exempted them from a conflagration in another, but was only its beginning.

SERMON X.

THE CURE OF DISQUIETING THOUGHTS ON PREDESTINATION.

"I give them life everlasting."—ST. JOHN x. 28.

- 1. And when, my gloomy thoughts, will you cease tormenting me with all these perplexing doubts and difficulties as to the final issue of my predestination? My soul is in the condition of some frail bark which, overtaken at the dead of night by the wild and merciless fury of the hurricane, no longer knows which of the waves it is to hail as a friend, which to fear as an enemy; for while one, lifting it up on high, promises fair to convey it to the stars, another, sinking it down to the bottom, threatens to carry it to the depths below. Just so a thought now comes into my mind, elevating my hopes, assuring me that I am numbered among the elect; and then comes another depressing me with fear, assuring me that I am condemned with the reprobate. But rest, rest, my poor distracted soul, for I discover a haven near at hand for my shelter; nor, wander and search where I may, a safer one, methinks, could scarcely be found in a night of such profound darkness, in a narrow strait of such dangerous navigation.

Away, then, ye theologians, away from me, and come no more to confuse my mind with your tiresome objections. What is it you say? That I do not know whether the election of persons to glory be subsequent to the foreknowledge of their good conduct or antecedent? Quite true; I do

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not know this. You object that I do not understand how the decrees of heaven, although immutable, are yet not compulsory? Quite true. You object that I do not comprehend how the Divine knowledge, although infallible, yet does not exclude contingency? Quite true again; I do not comprehend it. But what does all this prove? 'Tis but the fault of my own poor, defective sight, which is unable to penetrate other secret things far less abstruse and less sublime; as, for instance, the mysteries of nature. "With labor do we find the things that are before us."* Be this as it may, no human being shall ever persuade me that I can be finally lost if I do not wish it myself. Why, then, go about in search of a safer ground for your feet? Here, here is the rest to which I invite all those among you who, on this enormous ocean, are drifting to and fro without a rudder, without oars, without a mast, without sails. Refuse to cast anchor here, in a short time you must suffer shipwreck, either by splitting on some hidden rock with the unbeliever, or by sticking fast in some sandy beach with the ignorant. But that you may be convinced of my having a good reason for promising you here security, give me more than your wonted serious attention this morning, while I prove that God, so far as He is concerned, is most willing that all men should be saved—"I give them life everlasting"—and therefore that intolerable is the audacity of those who, not content with offending so merciful a God, would also cast on Him the blame of their own destruction, liking rather to accuse Him of being unjust than themselves of being impious and wicked.

2. First, then, the truth of the doctrine before us would be sufficiently proved by adducing those repeated declarations which God Himself makes to us in the Holy Scrip-

* Wis. ix. 16.

tures, where He impresses on our minds no one point so forcibly as this—that if we finally perish, it is our own fault. “Destruction is thy own, O Israel.” * Now, if this were not strictly true, God would be the greatest liar in all the world; inasmuch as He would not only deceive us in a most momentous concern, but would even persist in repeating the falsehood. But what interest can He possibly have to induce Him to deceive us, supposing Him to have it in His power? It was the opinion of Plato that every one who utters a lie does it from some fear he has of a superior power—as the criminal from the fear of his judge, the pupil from the fear of his teacher, the child from the fear of his mother, the servant from the fear of his master; whereas he who is placed above all such constraint has nothing whatever to deter him from openly speaking the truth. Hence that great philosopher inferred that God could never utter a falsehood, because no one could put Him in fear. This being granted, what fear could He ever have in candidly avowing that, without any regard to good works, He saves, according to a fancy of His own, whomsoever He wills; and also damns whomsoever he wills, supposing such to be the real fact? Would our noisy cavils, forsooth, at all distress him? Would our blasphemies at all disturb His composure? Would our opposition place His crown in jeopardy? Not a bit of it. “For who shall say, What hast Thou done? Who shall accuse Thee for the nations that perish?” So spake of Him the author of the Book of Wisdom: “For there is no other God but Thou, . . . neither shall king, nor tyrant in thy sight enquire about them whom Thou hast destroyed.” † We might revolt against Him to our heart’s content; for He would no more care for our uproar than the sun cares for those silly people

* *On. xii. 9.*

† *Wis. xii. 12-14.*

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of the south, who, when it appears above the horizon, either load it with their invectives or assail it with their arrows. So long as He assures us over and over again in His own Sacred Word that, so far as He is concerned, He desires the salvation of all men—"He will have all men to be saved"; * that He desires none should perish: "It is not the will of your Father who is in Heaven that one of these little ones should perish"; † "He is not willing that any should perish"; ‡ "He came not to destroy souls"; § and that He has no delight in the death of a sinner, "I desire not the death of the wicked" ||—but rather desires his conversion, "that he should turn from his way," and is anxious to have him saved, and live—such must surely be the true, undoubted fact. But, since rational argument is not to be slighted in a discussion of this nature, provided human reason does not take the precedence of authority, but follow after it, acting the part not of a mistress but of a hand-maid, I will adopt with your leave this method of proof also.

3. You know already, my hearers, that God being the cause of every other cause, and, as the schools say, the primary cause, it necessarily follows that He has a hand in all those different causes which are called subordinate or secondary; and this, as St. Thomas proves, to an extent far beyond any other cause. In this point of view, God has more to do in the springing up of the herbs of the field than what the soil has; more in the production of the metals than what the planets have; more in the respiration of the animals than what the air has; more in the ripening of the fruit than what the tree has; and so we may extend our survey. But if this holds good in its application to other effects produced, much more is it true in rela-

* 1 Tim. ii. 4.

† St. Matt. xviii. 14.

‡ 2 St. Pet. iii. 9.

§ St. Luke ix. 56.

|| Ezech. xxxiii. 22.

tion to man, in whose formation God bears the pre-eminent part. For in this case He does not merely concur, as being the Supreme Cause far exceeding every other in power, but His influence reaches beyond this. While from our earthly parents we simply derive our bodies—the inferior part—from Him comes to us directly that better part—our immortal soul. It is on this account that with a peculiar fitness we are called the sons of God rather than the sons of our father and of our mother; seeing that from God alone we derive all that which constitutes our distinctive nature. Our Lord seemingly referred to this particular circumstance when He said, “Call none your father upon earth, for one is your Father who is in heaven.”* Now, what follows from this? It follows that God, so far as He is concerned, can never have any wish to condemn us. “Neither hath He pleasure in the destruction of the living”—so we read in the Book of Wisdom.”†

Ye fathers, ye mothers, only just tell me: would you wish to see a child of yours perishing by your own free choice down there in the flames of hell? O father! what a question. And can you then suppose any wish in God that you should suffer such misery, in Him who is a Father to you in a much more exalted sense than you are to your own children? In such a case, it would be better for them to have an earthly father, who has comparatively done for them so little, than a heavenly Father who has done so much. Observe the conduct of that mother; see all the pain she suffers for the sake of her darling child whom she brought into the world. Does she work at the needle? it is for him. Does she speak? it is about him. Does she sleep? it is of him she dreams. She cannot bear him to be out of her sight. If she hears that terrible north wind

* St. Matt. xxiii. 9.

† Wisdom i. 29.

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blow, "Alas! should my son catch cold!" If she hears of a dangerous epidemic abroad, "Alas! should my son take it!" And she is so far from finding any pleasure in the death of her son that she cheerfully submits to many hardships in order to procure his happiness. But why do I dwell upon this? Don't we observe that even the brute beasts tenderly love their offspring? With what attention do they rear them! with what patience do they feed them! with what care do they provide for their maintenance! Observe the stork, when in some open exposed plain she can find no shelter for her tender progeny, how she spreads her wings as a canopy over them, so that the heat of the sun may alight on her, and not on them. Observe the eagle, when on some pressing occasion she must migrate with her little brood, how she carries them on her back, so that the arrow darted from below may pierce her body before it reaches theirs. Why, the very senseless productions of our own skill and industry—our pictures, our books, our statues—how dear are they to us. Take notice of that lady, how she loves her beautiful piece of embroidery because it is the work of her own fair hands; how troubled she is if she sees a particle of dust fallen upon it. Woe to those little urchins if they dare touch it; to that housemaid if she once soil it! She is careful to fold it up in the cleanest linen; she deposits it in her box, preserves it safe under lock and key, and watches over it as over a most precious treasure. And all for what reason? Because it is a property, inseparable from every cause, to love its own proper offspring, whether it be rational or irrational, animate or inanimate. And can you then harbor a suspicion against God, as if He, the far more excellent cause, the far more peculiar Father of us all, should, so far as He is concerned, love to see a single individual among you burning

through an endless eternity in furnaces of fire, or shrieking on the lakes of ice, or writhing in the hideous dungeons of torment? Sirs, this cannot be; this cannot be. "Neither hath He pleasure in the destruction of the living." This were to fashion a God far more degraded than any human being; ay, much worse than the brute beasts themselves. If by dint of our sins we compel Him to act as our Judge after He has in vain sought to act as our Father, He will reconcile His mind to our condemnation, because "as He is just, He orders all things justly";* but we are quite sure, adds the wise man, that, as concerns Himself, He does not wish us so great an evil. "He thinks it not consistent with His power to condemn him that hath not deserved to be punished." This is not to His mind; this is not His pleasure; and beyond all question He would far sooner act towards us the part of a Father than the part of a judge. And don't you observe the most tender, yearning solicitude with which "He stretches out His limbs, opens His side, offers His very heart, and invites our embraces; that by all such endearing appeals He may prove Himself to be our Father"? "What else," I further say with St. Peter Chrysologus—"what else does this certify but that God does not so much desire to be Lord as to be Father," and that "He implores us in His goodness that He may not have to avenge Himself in His severity"?

4. And, in truth, how can we ever regard Him as having any wish to destroy us, while He takes such vast pains to effect our salvation? What would be the wisdom of a man employing the most effectual means in order to bring about a certain end, when all the while he was firmly aiming at some end diametrically opposite? Who ever sows a field, but with a view to its not bearing fruit? Who ever

* Wi-4. xii. 15.

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waters a flower-pot, but with a view to its not having flowers? Who ever lights a fire, but with a view to its not burning? Who ever teaches a pupil, but with a view to his not learning? Who ever spurs a horse, but with a view to his not increasing his speed? These are the ideas of madmen. There is nothing surer than this, that, whenever we employ any means, our desire is to obtain the end to which those means will conduct us. Therefore it is quite impossible for God, seeing he is possessed of infinite wisdom, to employ at one time certain means with a view to save all men, and at the same time to wish that no men by those very means should be able to ensure their salvation.

Represent to your imagination a huntsman chasing the wild beast with breathless speed, now tracking it over the precipice, now pursuing it over the plain, now searching it in the cavern, suppose him here to have laid down his nets, there to have stationed his dogs, imagine him first shouting to scare the prey, then pausing and silent to secure it, and, lastly, taking his steady aim to bring it down; and that in the prosecution of his design he is all bathed in perspiration, yet without noticing it, and gored by the prickly thorns, yet without minding it. Can the slightest suspicion ever cross your mind as to the anxiety this huntsman really feels to catch the wild beast he is pursuing? No one will dare to maintain that he takes all this pains in order not to catch it; because, if he meant no more than this, there was no necessity for him to leave his comfortable home. He might have remained on his downy pillow, enjoyed his balmy slumbers without venturing abroad to face the cold, inclement air of daybreak, and risking his neck among the ragged rocks. Well, to apply this. God, in order to possess us in Paradise, acts like those huntsmen who, when they cannot come at the prey in one direction, pursue it by a

thousand others. So speaks St. Chrysostom on this point : " God does what huntsmen usually do when they are in pursuit of such animals as are most swift of foot and difficult to be caught. They do not attack them in one single but in many different directions, and generally quite opposite ones, so that should they escape one they fall into another." But far beyond doing this, God has wearied Himself, has covered Himself with wounds and with blood, and even torn Himself in pieces, in order to possess us. What then does this signify ? Does it not most clearly express His good-will toward us ? If He had no mind to have us, He could have stayed in heaven ; He was under no necessity to visit our lower world. What end could He propose to Himself in suffering such pains of hunger, of thirst, of cold, of heat, of nakedness, of journeyings, of thorns, of scourges, of nails ? Could he not have spared Himself all this misery ?

Now, you must not tell me that He suffered so much in behalf only of those who were to be saved, and not in behalf of those who were to be damned. For to assert this would be a horrible blasphemy, the very one condemned in our own days by the Vatican as being wicked, profane, heretical, and highly reflecting upon the goodness of God. " There is one mediator between God and man"—nothing can be plainer than the Apostle's words—" who gave Himself a redemption for all." * Christ, in the truest sense of the word, died for all men, whether good or wicked, elect or reprobate. 'Tis on this account He is often entitled in the inspired Scriptures " the Sun" and " the Sun of Justice"—that is, the sun alike to all ; as St. Ambrose testified of Him : " The Sun of Righteousness rose upon all men, came to all men, suffered for all men, rose again for all

* 1 Tim. ii. 5, 6.

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men." Therefore, so far as He is concerned, for all who wish it, He has opened heaven; for all who do not wish it, He has closed hell, and by His merits has procured from the Father sufficient helps for all men, in using which they may save themselves to the uttermost; even as St. John, who certainly well knew this truth, declared, "Of His fulness we all have received." †

5. It is, moreover, necessary that these same helps should be extended to all men with the strictest fidelity; not only because the Eternal Father cannot deny us what His Incarnate Son has purchased and merited for us with His most precious Blood, but for this further reason. Were we left without the most ample means by which to save ourselves, it would follow, as St. Thomas observed, that all, even irrational, creatures would have been better furnished with means to attain their several ends, than man to attain his. Survey the whole creation; you will not find a single object which God has not supplied with a proper capacity for attaining the end assigned to it. The end marked out to the heavens, is for them to be in perpetual motion, thereby to impart their influences to our globe; therefore, since they have no such informing spirit as we have to set them moving, a presiding Intelligence has been allotted to them. The stars are to relieve the horrors of the night during its thickest darkness; but they possess not in themselves a sufficiency of light for the purpose; therefore the sun is under express orders to provide them with it from his ever-refulgent orb. The earth has to satisfy the wishes of the unconscionable farmer; but it does not contain in itself a sufficiency of moisture for this end; therefore the waters act on a permanent commission to fertilize it with their subterraneous channels. Brute beasts have not the skill to furnish

† St. John I. 16.

themselves either with garments, as a preservative against the cold, or with armor, as a defence against the enemy; see then how, at their very entrance into the world. Providence provides them with all they want in these respects. Against the cold it shelters some with a thick skin, others with feathers, others with scales. Against their enemy it arms some with claws, others with beaks, others with stings. The oysters, limpets, and scallop-fish, which live clinging to the rocks, have no feet to use in going to procure their sustenance. What, then, becomes of them? Why, the very rock itself round about them teems with the food they like. If the whale, that enormous live ship, were to roam about the sea by itself, it would often incur the hazard of foundering on the shore; therefore a very small, tiny fish has the instinct to become its pioneer. If the quails, a weaker race, traversed the air alone, they would often fall a prey to the ravenous vultures; therefore certain other birds have consented to form their convoy. And so we may carry our enquiries over the universe, and not find an instance of a single creature, however insignificant, which, being devoid of all power in itself to attain its destined end, is not equipped with some other help placed at its disposal.

And now answer me this question: Pray, would you have God make a better provision for the brutes, who are the servants of man, than He does for man, who is the lord over the brutes? But, for a certain, He would be doing this if matters were not so ordered as I have stated. For the end of man is to attain a superhuman happiness, such as is utterly beyond the compass of his own unassisted ability. We must, therefore, of necessity affirm that God most surely provides him with other means—and those true and efficacious—by which he secures his end, his glorious destination.

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Besides, in order that we may gain our end, He binds us to it by the most rigid precepts, and under the heaviest penalties. He bids us, by St. Paul, "Lay hold on eternal life,"* an expression tantamount to saying, "Although it seems to fly away before thee, yet thou must outstrip it, and seize it for thine own; *lay hold*." It is right, then, that He should supply us with the ability to do all this; otherwise would He not be the most barbarous tyrant we can well imagine? For what idea of God would you form in your mind were He to command us to fly, but gave us no wings for that purpose? or to bid us speak, but refuse us a tongue? or to bid us see, but decline to give us sight? Only, then, bear in mind, that it is far more beyond our power by our own single exertions to obtain eternal happiness, than it would be for us to see without sight, to speak without a tongue, to fly without wings.

And do you pretend that God will not accommodate us with such helps as will prove sufficient to strengthen and confirm the power we possess? "For if among men it militates against all justice that one in authority should exact of his subordinates what he gives them no strength to accomplish, how can we reconcile it to our consciences to make God thus act towards us?" So Ennodius exclaimed, and so I exclaim too. If such a despotism could not be overlooked in a man, how shall it be tolerated in a God? Did not Saul offer his own armor to David when he wished him to venture forth against the Philistine? Did not Eliseus lend his own staff to Giezi when he wished him to restore life to the widow's child? Did not Moses commit his own rod to Aaron when he wished him to people all Egypt with the flies? And how shall not God act in a like manner when He not only wishes us to take posses-

* 1 Tim. vi. 12.

sion of Paradise, but absolutely commands us so to do? "Lay hold on eternal life." Therefore, those assistances which are unquestionably needful to the attainment of so vast an end—call them by what name you please, define them as you think best; that is no concern of mine—are never refused to any individual, however wicked. For he either has them already, or, otherwise, by his mere asking, he can at once procure them, as the Council teaches (Sess. vi. c. 10), in conformity with that most famous axiom of St. Augustine: "God does not command things impossible; but by giving us the command He directs us either to do what lies in our power, or to seek help for what exceeds it." It follows that every justified person can continue in a state of grace, if he be willing; every wicked person can find grace, provided he be willing; and so all persons have an equal ability to save themselves, be they only willing. We fall back, therefore, on our first proposition; we conclude that we cannot cast the blame of our destruction upon God. "In very deed he will not condemn without cause." * He rather desires every man's salvation with an unfeigned, generous, and thoroughly sincere good-will; ay, and Himself helps towards it, so far as He can consistently do so. "God will have all men to be saved." †

6. But you will here stop me, and urge, by way of rejoinder, that it is now your turn to speak. "Grant that all have sufficient helps allowed them by which to save themselves, still is it not true that some persons have a greater share of these helps and some a less? Well, this is the cause why we make such tardy progress towards heaven. You must not flinch, father, from this difficulty. We certainly expect you to remove it. Did God only grant to us the very same mighty assistances which He

* Job xxxiv. 29.

† 1 Tim. ii. 4.

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vouchsafes to this or to that individual, so much our superior in holiness, we, too, should be perfect, we, too, should become saints. But with us He contracts His hand, and with them he expands it. And so it will be nothing strange if we come to a bad end (which God forbid!), inasmuch as we only receive just a sufficiency, and they enjoy a superfluity."

Why, this rejoinder of yours is enough to set me on fire with indignation. O man! who art thou that repliest against God? Silence, I bid you, or with these words of the apostle I will cry you down: "O man! O man! who art thou?" Are *you*, then, the person to presume to sit in judgment upon God? If he gives you in full weight and exact measure all that He ever engaged to give you, what have you to complain of? Why these murmurings? Why these growlings? Do you, then, mean by this to impute the blame of your destruction to God? It is false, it is false. Shall He not be liberal towards one without wronging another? Oh! this is something very fine! It is God alone, in all the world, who is not allowed specially to oblige a friend! So long as what is due to each individual is regularly awarded him, "nothing wrong is done," says St. Prosper—"no, not if, among the company of the faithful, neither the same nor equal advantages are conferred." Have I not proved that God supplies you with a grace that is amply sufficient? Having this, be content, and depart in peace. But no; on second thoughts, I wish to detain you, for I would ask you with what face can you dare accuse God of stinting His favors toward you, just as if you were not now making your complaint here in this city, here in this church, and now in these favored times? What complaints, then, might be expected from those wretched barbarous races who, in their ill-starred destiny, were

born either on the lonely shores, or within the forsaken islands, where the marshy waste or the monsters of the deep have absolutely prevented the entrance of the faith and the planting of its victorious banner? And yet, even in their extreme case, they will not have a word to breathe in self-justification if they destroy themselves by their sins. "Neither are they to be pardoned." Why not? For no other reason, we know, but this: "because by the greatness and beauty of the creatures the Maker of them is seen;" * because they had the means, in the knowledge they possessed of His creatures, to raise themselves, as by a ladder, to the recognition of the Creator, and therefore to serve and obey Him according to that scanty measure of light He had flashed upon their minds. What, then, can you say for yourselves? Can you complain that you are suffering from a deplorable want of means—you, who have been born in the bosom of Christianity, in so favored a city, in so learned an age, and—many of you—of such noble families? What a treasure-house of the knowledge of Himself has God given you in all the oracles of Scripture! Did not most of you spend the very critical period of your early lives under the fostering care of parents most anxious about your good conduct, of masters who quite lived to make you happy? As you reached years of maturity, what peculiar helps and encouragements to a holy life did you possess in being so amply provided with spiritual fathers, so well qualified to direct you! In the plentiful store you had of earnest preachers, so competent to inflame your zeal! In such an abundance of good books, always at hand to nourish your faith! In such a body of religious men, eager to be engaged in your service! And what is the one great object of those guardian angels ever

* Wisdom xiii. 5.

near you but to encourage you, now to avoid that vice, now to practise that virtue, now to resist that temptation, now to imitate that good example! How does God Himself, by His secret internal illuminations, help to sweeten to you the work of your salvation! Does He, if I may so speak, leave one stone unturned? Now He draws you by invitations, now He terrifies you with menaces, now He rouses you with reproofs, now He caresses you with prosperity, now He chastens you with the scourges of adversity. "On every side"—I use the words of St. Augustine—"He calls us to amendment of life. He calls us in our enjoyment of His creatures, He calls us by the reading of the Scriptures, He calls us by religious books, He calls us by His secret inspirations, He calls us by the rod of reproof, He calls us by the mercies of consolation." And, after all this, do you complain of Him? Grant that He does impart to some more powerful helps than He does to you, so as almost to appear bent on saving them despite of themselves, as He acted towards Saul of Tarsus, whom He denounced for having already kicked "against the goad";* can this in the least justify your complaints, seeing that He helps you in so many different ways, and gives you not only what simply suffices, but even more than suffices for your necessities?

7. I would fain, however, with your leave, advance a step further, and stop every mouth by an argument considered by theologians to be most weighty; one, too, of general application. Tell me, then, are you quite sure that your helps, received to enable you to lead a Christian life, fall short of those given to others more advanced in virtue? Perhaps because you find yourselves their inferiors in virtue, you therefore conclude that you are less provided with

* Acts ix. 5.

grace, less furnished with assistances. But I deny the truth of the fact altogether that it necessarily follows, when a person leads a less holy life, that this always arises from his having received less grace; and that always, when a person has received more grace, it must likewise follow that he will be more holy. No, sirs. It is quite possible for two individuals, though supplied with an equal measure of grace, to perform actions so unlike that while one deserves signal praise, the other deserves no praise at all. The fault here is not in the grace, which is the same in both cases, but in the co-operation, which is altogether different. If you refuse to take this on my credit, hear what St. Thomas says about it, though some have endeavored to extract from his words an opposite doctrine: "Although certain baptized persons sometimes may receive an equal measure of grace, yet do they not employ it equally; but while one through his diligence grows by means of it, the other, through his remissness, is wanting to it." One is greatly benefited, the other not at all, in the proportion to the use they severally make of it. Now, don't you observe how, under the heat of the same sun, wax melts, clay hardens? Just so, St. Jerome tells us, under the influence of the same grace one heart becomes tender, another obdurate. Don't you see how, under the same showers of rain, one field sprouts with flowers, another with weeds? Just so, says Origen, under the influence of the same grace one heart fructifies, another degenerates. And how clearly, too, does St. Augustine establish this doctrine, to the shame of his modern depravers! He puts the case of two persons, either through natural constitution or the efforts of grace, exactly of the same dispositions of mind—both of them, he says, shall gaze on the same female countenance, and one of them, nevertheless, shall be carried away with pleasurable excite-

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ment, while the other preserves his soul in chastity ; and thus from no other cause than the very different use and improvement each makes of his own free-will. St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. John Chrysostom, St. Cyril, St. Prosper, and St. Bonaventura, alike confirm this doctrine in their writings. The last of them expressly teaches that "sometimes a stronger and sometimes a slighter emotion is excited in men's minds, the grace in both cases being equal, and this depends upon the co-operation of their free-will."

How, then, can you have the confidence to affirm that you have not received from God an amount of assistance to enable you to lead a good life, equal to what this or that person has received ? Who told you this ? What evidence have you to produce ? What ground do you go upon ? Say, if you please, that your grace does not bring forth fruit, that it is ineffectual, that it is unproductive, that it comes to nothing. Say this, and you will speak the truth. But who, then, is to blame ? Are not you, who, instead of turning the grace of Heaven to a good account, and with the zeal required in his beloved Timothy by the Apostle, when he bade him not to "neglect the grace that was in him,"* leave the grace God gives you quite neglected, just like those idle or ignorant pilots who lag in the rear of the other vessels, not because they have not the same propitious gale of wind to speed them on, but because they omit to spread their sails when it blows ? Let us, then, hear no more of these querulous speeches against God. Never impute that as a fault in His gracious bounty which arises from a defect in your own voluntary choice ; it being perfectly certain that He willeth your salvation, and therefore gives you every help in abundance to effect it, and far beyond what barely suffices ; yea, He favors you, it may be,

* 1 Tim. iv. 14.

more in this respect than He does some of your brethren who have yet got the start of you in sanctity and a heavenly mind.

Again, forasmuch as He must needs perceive in His foreknowledge that you will fail in co-operating with the assistances He affords you, for this reason the blame clearly lies at your door; for you have not done your part. Job describes sinners as being persons who "rebel against the light." * The fault was not on the part of God because He omitted to give them the clearest means of knowing the truth. No; they themselves closed their own eyes, so that they might not know it. As we read in another place, "They said unto the Lord, Depart from us"; † and in another, "They, as it were on purpose, have revolted from Him, and would not understand all His ways." ‡ And therefore, as a rule, impute all you suffer to your own fault. "Destruction is thy own, O Israel!" Heartily confess within yourselves, "It is I; I am he that have sinned; I have done wickedly." § Confess with Jeremias that voluntarily you sell yourselves to be slaves to your enemy for the sake of getting a mere nothing. "We have given our hand to Egypt and to the Assyrians, that we might be satisfied with bread." || Confess that you yield and surrender; confess that you fall down prostrate. It is all too true. But why? Because it was your own pleasure; you wish to fall, you wish to surrender. No other reason can be assigned. "We deceive ourselves;" ¶ St. John says this of them. See you not how vast is the power of evil spirits when they combine their forces? Yet not the smallest advantage can they obtain over you, unless you give your consent and allow them. They can instigate you, they can importune

* Job xxiv. 13.

† Job xxi. 14, xxii. 17.

‡ Job xxxiv. 27.

§ 2 Kings xxiv. 17.

|| Lam. v. 6.

¶ 1 St. John i. 8.

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you; but they cannot compel you. They "have said to thy soul"—mark that striking passage in *Isaias* to this effect—they "have said to thy soul, Bow down, that we may go over."* Do you hear this? They do not dare set a foot upon you. "Bow down, bow down." They make it their petition that you should prostrate yourself upon the earth. Accordingly, if they frequently get the better of you, if they kick you and trample you under foot, whence does it arise? Because, by an act of your own, you meanly consent to place yourselves under their degrading heels. They "have said to thy soul, Bow down, bow down, that we may go over; and thou hast laid thy body as the ground, and as a way to them that went over." Well, then, Christians, keep a good firm hold of your free-will, and never doubt the result. You will be safe, quite safe. The hellish *Holofernes* will never be able to touch the fair *Judith*—I mean your soul—if she stand firm. All he can do is to get her to "consent, of her own accord,"† to consent willingly. But leave him to his own devices; never mind him. Avoid to the utmost all occasions of temptation. Make a proper use of the means of grace and salvation. Frequent the sacraments, continually commend yourself in prayer unto the Lord that He would come to your help; and I give you my word for it that you, too, will save yourselves, as others do.

8. But what is it, after all, that lies at the bottom of the whole matter? I can inform you. The main point you are aiming at is to devise some means of enjoying the world beyond what is allowed you, and yet, at the same time, of smuggling yourselves into Heaven. You would fain live after your own corrupt inclinations, indulge every desire, gratify every lust, and then succeed in getting to Paradise

* *Is. li. 23.*

† *Judith xii. 20.*

without having done one single thing to get there, and almost hoping, perhaps, that Paradise would come down to the earth to find you, and spare you every kind of inconvenience. But this is a thing utterly impossible. In the Bible one instance alone do we read of Paradise thus coming down to the earth to find any man; and that man was St. John. "I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven."* But what was the occasion of its coming down? What spot of earth did it touch? Have you ever considered this? It alighted on "a great and high mountain"; † a lofty eminence, a bare, rugged mountain. And why so? As that city had to descend, why not upon a plain, and thus spare the now so aged, enfeebled, decrepit apostle the fatigue of toiling up the mountain? Not so, not so, my hearers. Paradise is no gift to the sluggard; this is the mystery taught us here. Paradise is no gift to the sluggard. You must learn to get rid of such a foolish mistake. God willeth to bestow upon us His glory, but to do it in the shape of a reward; yes, a reward, and therefore we ourselves must take some steps, and go forward to secure it. God "hath not appointed us to wrath"—this is most true—to what hath He appointed us? to salvation? No; but "unto the purchasing of salvation;" so says the apostle. ‡ His will is that no occasion be given us in this world either to become slothful or to become proud. In order to this, what has He done? He has so contrived that the work of our everlasting salvation should be neither entirely His doing nor entirely our doing; not entirely ours, that we may keep ourselves humble; not entirely His, that we may not fall into idleness. St. John Chrysostom thus pointed it out: "God would not have us slothful, and therefore He does not do everything for us; nor would He

* Apoc. xxi. 2.

† Apoc. xxi. 10.

‡ 1 Thess. v. 9.

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have us proud, and therefore He does not leave us to do everything for ourselves." But what we prefer is, that He should do the whole, and ourselves nothing. This cannot be. It is His part to call us; ours to answer. It is His part to invite us; ours to come. "Thou shalt call me, and I will answer Thee." He will cheer us on our ascent, and push us on and bear us up. "To the work of Thy hands Thou shalt reach out Thy right hand";* so that we may at last gain the summit, the lofty eminence, there to find the beauteous city, the new Jerusalem; but at our first setting out we must be on our guard not to offer Him any resistance; for, should this happen, and we, in consequence, come short of the salvation we desire, it is perfectly certain that the blame will rest, not upon God, but upon ourselves. "Destruction is thy own, O Israel!"

THE SECOND PART.

9. There is another excuse which might be pleaded in favor of the wicked, on the supposition that God, in order to save them, required of them some very difficult duties, or some very painful sacrifices; because on this ground they might lay to His blame a portion of their sufferings, should they finally perish and not be saved. But where does He ever demand of men any such sacrifice, in order to save their souls, as He does not see them already enduring, in order to ruin them? Hear what Jeremias has expressly recorded of sinners: "They have labored to commit iniquity."† Don't you believe that most of them pay an exorbitant price for their iniquity? "They have labored, they have labored." Who can tell the amount of

* Job xiv. 15.

† Jer. ix. 5.

fatigue, how they overwork themselves, in order that they may perish? Now, please inform me, my hearers, is the law of Christ a difficult law? O father! such a question to ask us! Is it difficult? But answer me, in what respect is it difficult? Does the difficulty lie in its ill-usage of our bodies, that they may not rebel against the Spirit? But how severe are those hardships you inflict upon those bodies when you are carrying on some illicit trade or business? Do you not labor and expose them to heat and cold, to storm and tempest? Perhaps the difficulty lies in bringing your wills under complete subjection to the dictates of reason? But to how many acts of bondage do you degrade yourself when you are seeking some promotion; one, it may be, little to your credit? Do you not labor in going about cringing before courtiers, and statesmen, and officials? I shall say, then, here with S. Augustine, "If the soul suffers so much in order to get means of its perishing, what ought it to suffer in order that it may not perish?"

Perhaps, however, the law of God proves difficult in this particular, that it commands us, if we wish to save our souls, to value nothing upon earth in comparison of them—neither money, nor country, nor family, nor health; in a word, not even our own lives, when they may be required of us. But how often have we hazarded our very lives for the sake of some paltry notion of worldly honor! Are not people continually adjusting some matter of title, or precedence, or diversity of opinion, with the point of the sword? Never mind property, never mind family, never mind bloodshed, never mind the body, never mind the soul—all must go rather than not take our revenge! Knowing what an unequal match you were, and how far less influence you had to second you, you yourselves were the first to provoke

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an enemy, the first to insult him, the first to strike him, and with your most absurd challenges you have *labored* to go and lay bare your bosom to his sword. And when did it ever occur to you to hazard any such great thing for the sake of God? Does He ever demand more of you, to enable Him to give you heaven, than what you exact from yourselves to purchase hell? "O blind and desperate madness!" I exclaim with the eloquent Salvia. "Most miserable of men, what study and pains you are at to make yourselves wretched for ever! With far less painstaking, with far less paying court, you might succeed in making yourselves eternally happy!" Answer this to the best of your ability. You cannot evade the force of the arguments. Were your strength not sufficient to support you under evils endured for the sake of purchasing hell, you might plead with some color of reason your inability to endure trials necessary to your obtaining heaven. But if you have a power to do what is bad, how can you excuse yourselves as not being likewise able to do what is good? And then, how much further might I press this argument, knowing, as we do, that reprobate sinners not only *labor* to destroy themselves, but even *weary themselves* in the task! 'Tis the confession themselves made in hell: "We wearied ourselves in the way of iniquity and destruction, and have walked through hard ways."* I have not alluded at all to the hardships of war, nor to the horrors of a battle, nor to the perplexities of a lawsuit, nor to the pangs of ambition, nor to the cares of avarice, nor to the debilitating effects of intemperance; nor have I said a word of the pains, anxieties, and distractions of the one single mad passion of love—the tears shed, the servilities undergone, the jealousies endured, the insults put up with, the dangers encountered,

* Wis. v. 7.

the nights' rest disturbed, the money squandered away, the reputation scattered to the winds, the diseases, even of foreign growth, contracted on this account. And are we not constantly coming in contact with our modern Ammons, who are "lean from day to day,"* for the sake of a Thamar, who pine and waste away in their inordinate lust? If you would only, ye young men, do for God's sake a very small part of what you sometimes do for some vile, abandoned mistress—I argue the point, you see, very plainly with you—would you do for His sake but this little, you would be more than saved; you would become saints.

10. "O father!" you will reply, "in a matter of this sort you have no experience! We allow that the ills you have enumerated are painful; but then such sufferings have their pleasure and fascination. Our poets—perhaps you were not acquainted with the fact—have therefore called them *dolci amari*—sufferings sweetly bitter: they are congenial with our nature; they are just according to our taste; they are wholly unlike what we have to bear in obeying the laws of the Gospel; for these are all uncongenial, all distasteful." Say you so? I really was not aware of the great difference between the two; but I thank you for your timely suggestion; for what you say will now enable me to clench my argument more firmly. How, then, are we to account for this difference? Is it because the sufferings themselves, as to the matter of each, are so different? We can hardly say this, for it would flatly contradict the understanding we came to when I spoke of enduring, for the sake of God, the same hunger, the same thirst, the same sleepless night, the same struggles, which men suffer for the sake of others. The whole difference, therefore, comes to this: that in one case you suffer it for others,

* 2 Kings xiii. 4.

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whereas in the other case you would suffer it for God. And, because you suffer it for others, it is therefore pleasant, it is therefore charming, it is therefore transformed into a "sweet bitter." Do I not state a fact? Come, then; sinners really now have gained their cause. Should they fail to obtain their salvation, they have their excuse in readiness, nor will they find it hard to justify themselves. Why should I spend my time and labor any more in preparing my proofs, waste my breath with such long periods, exhaust my strength with all these arguments? We may close the case at once. Sinners have a triumphant answer to every indictment. Why should we further wait and delay?

Let the angels at once draw nigh, let the saints draw nigh, let the devils draw nigh, let the heavens draw nigh, let the earth draw nigh, and let them all together now listen to me: "Hear these things, all ye nations; give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world." * It is something for *all* to hear. Sinners, if they do not save themselves, are nevertheless to be excused—yes, after all, they are to be excused. And why? Is it because God had no will to admit them into heaven? Not so; for He, as being their Father—their Father surely in the very highest sense—was most willing and favorably disposed to save them. Is it because they had not helps sufficient to enable them to get to heaven? Not so; for it was their lot to be born in a land where these helps are peculiarly abundant. Is it because the helps they received were not equal to those received by others, who thereby were enabled to save themselves? Not so; for the rule does not always hold good that the man of the holiest life must have received the greatest helps. Is it, then, because they were

* Ps. xlviii. 2.

not accustomed to bear all those trying hardships which the desire of salvation exacts of them? No, not even so; for they bear far heavier burdens for the sake of some worldly interest and ambition, some caprice or point of honor, or, at times, something still worse; insomuch that, as Jeremias lamented, they are most willing to "serve strange gods day and night, who give them no rest." * Why, then, is it that, if they do not save themselves, they are yet to stand excused? Behold the why and the wherefore! Because they would have to endure these hardships and these inconveniences for the sake of God! I repeat it—to endure them all for the sake of God! This at once relieves them from all possible blame in the matter—they would have to endure them for the sake of God! Are you satisfied, ye sinners, bearing, as you do, the name of Christ, with such an excuse as this? Is it your wish to plead it in self-defence, and that it should tell in your favor? Well, have your way. Be it so. Carry it with you to the presence of Christ. Speak it out lustily with a good courage, that all may hear you: "Were we called upon to bear for the sake of others what we must needs bear for **your** sake, we should not find this task so difficult; it would rather be often pleasant, congenial with our nature, and just according to our taste; so as to deserve the name of a *dolce amaro*—a sweet bitterness. But for your sake we can't do this. We should feel any suffering for your sake to be total bitterness and no sweet at all." Shame upon you, ye sinners! Can you find the heart to address Christ in any such manner? Is this the reverence you owe to His streaming blood? Is this the gratitude you bear him for his poor, mangled wounds—blood streaming for you, wounds mangled on your account? To

* Jer. xvi. 22.

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tell Him to His face that there is no pleasure in anything you suffer for the sake of God! Ah! it comes out too clearly that you yourselves have, in this matter at least, no experience to guide you. However, supposing you to be quite satisfied with this excuse, you have only to go on living in your sins as you like. For my part, I should feel ashamed in any longer disputing this question with you. But should your eyes be open to detect in this excuse the very worst plea you have ever urged in your defence, where will you then turn to find another? On what will you depend? And where is your answer? Will you not be convinced that the wisest possible resolution all we sinners can now adopt for ourselves is to enter from this very moment upon the amendment of our lives, that we may so escape that tremendous condemnation into which whosoever falleth will have none to blame but himself? "Destruction is thy own, O Israel!"

SERMON XI.

AN EXPOSURE OF THE WORLD'S TREACHERY.

"I give testimony of it that the works thereof are evil."—St JOHN vii. 7.

I. If in a well-ordered commonwealth handsome rewards and noble tributes of gratitude are usually given to any class of persons, it is surely to those who discover a traitor. Assuerus, the famous king of Asia, whose sceptre swayed one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, advanced, it is well known, to royal dignities that Mardochai by whose means he became acquainted with the treacherous designs of Bagatha and Thara, two noble chamberlains of his palace. Tiberius rewarded Antonia, the wife of Drusus, who revealed to him the plot devised against him by Sejanus. Pyrrhus rewarded Phænarete, the wife of Samon, who revealed to him the plot devised against him by Neoptolemus; and Croesus, either to express his thanks or to recommend a good example, raised a golden statue, afterwards placed by him in the temple of Delphos, to a common soldier who discovered the trap laid for him by his mother-in-law. I have therefore good ground this morning to expect some substantial token of your gratitude, as I come here with the sole design of unmasking to your view an arch-traitor. And who is he? Whoever he be, let him find no mercy. Condemn him, strip him, expose him to the gaze of the multitude. I will inform you who this same

traitor is. I much fear, however, you will not believe what I tell you; for many among you are already with him on such friendly terms as to be more disposed to take his part, stand up in his defence, and perhaps go the length of charging me with doing him a great injustice; so far shall I be from finding any inclination among you to thank and to reward me for my services. But really I am doing him no injustice at all. He is a declared traitor, a most unmistakable traitor, for he bears all the marks of that character; and woe be to the man who will not take heed and guard against him!

The traitor I speak of is the world. And have I not a cause? Let Christ, our Redeemer, decide the question, who came to this earth expressly to reveal to man a fact of so great truth and importance. He said, "I give testimony of the world that the works thereof are evil." Now, what possible reason could have existed for a testimony so illustrious, had the *evil* of these *works* been known already to mankind? There are thousands who, from ignorance of this truth, place implicit confidence in the world, worship it, cleave to it, and every day of their lives become more devoted to its service. And is it your wish to belong to this class? Oh! could I now disclose its many artful devices, and explain its practices to you, you would certainly all be of St. Paul's opinion. He formed the habit, as he tells us himself, of paying no more regard to the world than he would pay to a malefactor nailed to the cross. "The world is crucified to me." * Should you, however, not be able to travel so far with the Apostle, yet at the least I would have you make up your minds not to love the world, not to be on such friendly terms with it, not to give it your confidence. This is what, under all circumstances, I

* Gal. vi. 14.

must claim at your hands; and would you be convinced of the justice of my claim, please to attend.

2. First, my hearers, confess the strong inclination you feel to serve the world. Is not this the case? Here, then, let us fix our enquiry. And what is that quality in the world which disposes and decides you to serve it? Perhaps the promises it offers, all so rich, so munificent, and in such perfect harmony with your taste? This must be it. The world promises you pleasures, it promises you riches, it promises you honors; these are advantages which mortals naturally covet, which we pursue with a desperate fondness, exceeding that which the bears show for honey, the hart for the waterbrook, and the silly insect for the candle. No wonder, then, you are so ready to listen to the world's proposals. But, oh! the delusion. How is it that your eyes are not open at once to detect the imposture? This same wondrous condescension the world shows you—mark what I affirm—this condescension ought to be the very thing to furnish you with clear, certain, and infallible evidence of the world's hereby declaring itself to be a traitor. Every traitor manages to creep into people's favor by offering them something agreeable to the senses. Who is so ignorant as not to know this? Cain betrayed Abel by proposing to him a ramble into the woods: "Let us go forth abroad." * Jacl betrayed Sisara by inviting him to an idle repose. Dalila betrayed Samson by inviting him to a fond endearment. Tryphon betrayed Jonathan by giving him at first an honorable reception;† instances to the same purport are innumerable. "The chief business of a deceiver is to offer first what pleases, that he may inflict afterwards what pains." This was the remark of St. Chrysostom. Therefore, as long as the world so indulgently panders to

* Gen. iv. 8.

† 1 Mach. xii.

our natural, and even our corrupt and inordinate, lusts, is it not quite certain that it is not treating us fairly and handsomely; unless you are prepared to give those *Lamiae* credit for sincerity, who bared their bosoms to the passer-by, inviting him to taste the milk, and then dashed out his brains? "My son, if sinners shall entice thee"—this is the good advice of Solomon—"if sinners shall entice thee, consent not to them." *

3. And, to say the truth, have you ever seriously enquired into the nature of those gifts the world so very profusely offers you? You certainly must regard them as being vastly considerable; and yet they are all mere illusion—apparent gifts, but real injuries. For this reason they were compared by some to the apple of our first parents; by others to the apple of Eudocia; by others, to the apple of Paris—all gifts full of death and destruction. I would, however, compare them, as may be better done, to another gift; one of an apple, too, and that most fatal. I refer to the manner in which Kenneth, King of Scotland, was miserably tricked and injured. This prince for his amusement went one day into the delightful garden of the palace, when his attention was arrested by a statue that exceeded the rest in height and grandeur as it stood before him in the attitude of presenting him with a golden apple. The king, not in the least suspecting any imposture, reached out his hand, and, from the facility he had acquired by long habit of receiving all sorts of presents from all sorts of persons, confidently expected that the statue, though a block of marble, might yet have something to give him. But how dearly did he pay for his confidence! For instantly, together with the golden apple, leaped forward a dart of

* Prov. I. 10.

the keenest edge, which the figure kept in its left hand always ready for execution. It did not allow the king a moment to foresee his danger and to avert it, but at once struck him dead. Just like this are those gifts which the world hands over to its votaries. St. John Damascen states it plainly: "This is the nature of the world's advantages and gifts. It lays traps in the path of all who seek its enjoyments." True. Its votaries have their pleasures, and with them every means to satisfy their lust; and, oh! what a lovely apple is here! But, soon after, with these pleasures are combined tedious debilities and pains in the body, internal derangements, external sores, such as confine them perpetually to the sick-chamber—there behold the dart! Its votaries have their riches, with them to make ample provision for an easy, luxurious life; oh! what a lovely apple is here! But, soon after, with their riches are combined the harassing cares of trade, of negotiations, of lawsuits, of bankruptcies, such as condemn them to a life of constant disquietude—and there behold the dart! Its votaries have their honors with which to blazon forth in public their fine titles; oh! what a lovely apple is here! But, soon after, with their honors are combined a thousand rival animosities in matters of precedence, of pedigree, of court intrigue, of state affairs, such as condemn them to a life of endless contention—and there behold the dart! In a word, "the whole world is seated in wickedness,"* as St. John affirmed. The world is built upon evil, according to St. Cyprian's description: "It smiles, that it may rage; it fondles, that it may deceive; it allures, that it may kill."

And are you still undecided? Can't you yet make up your mind? Are additional proofs needed to convince

* 1 St. John v. 29.

you of the world's treachery? To what purpose are the good things it pours into your lap, if found to be replete with cares, replete with mischief; such good things as have the mere appearance and shadow of what is good—such as in the Book of Wisdom were called the froth of the sea, because they are so bitter; such as were regarded by a St. James as a vapor of the air, because they are so empty; such as were esteemed by David as straw upon the housetop, because they are so soon withered; such as by Solomon, who knew them all but too intimately, were pronounced to be nothing after all but “vanity and vexation of spirit”;* or, as the Arabic version has it, “a straitness of spirit”; or, as the Chaldee reads it, “a wear of the spirit”; or, as the Syriac, “the troubling of the spirit”; or as Vatablus, “a breaking down of the spirit”; or, as St. Jerome with Theodotion and with Symmachus interpret it, “a feeding upon the wind”? We learn from this last striking figure that he who expects to satisfy his hunger with such good things is simply nourishing himself with so much wind—a sort of food which, while it fails to impart strength, breeds inward disquietude, produces convulsions, causes the most excruciating pains. Of a man starving on this food Job says: “When he shall be filled, he shall be straitened, he shall burn, and every sorrow shall fall upon him.”† And will you be such an arrant fool as to offer your services to the world because it promises you an abundance of good things like these? Oh! what folly. Oh! what rashness. Oh! what fatuity. Was not Isaiah quite right when he pressed this question upon you: “Why do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy you”?‡

4. And, oh! how properly does he add, “which does not

* Eccl. i. 14.

† Job xx. 29.

‡ Isaiah lv. 2.

satisfy." For, supposing the advantages we have specified, false and counterfeit as they are, to be nevertheless desirable, still what is our hope? That the world will ever bestow them upon us so as fully to satisfy our desires? A hope like this only shows your little knowledge in the matter. It will bestow them upon the same principle that water was once doled out during a siege to the inhabitants of Bethulia; that is to say, by a scanty and limited allowance. If, however, on any occasion it should open its hand liberally, it will withdraw it on the first opportunity. For you must know that with all its care, like a shrewd man of business, to maintain a good credit, the world is a bankrupt; it has no such amount of capital as to be able at one and the same time to answer the demand of its numerous claimants. How, then, does this traitor escape the difficulty? In order to give to one who happens to be the most troublesome and importunate, it takes away from some other; nor, search as you may, will you ever find it has enriched one person except by impoverishing another; ever advanced one without depressing another.

When Samson found himself bound to pay the thirty changes of raiment he had promised at the marriage feast to the expounders of his famous riddle, what did he do to get them? He went down to Ascalon, and there stripped thirty men, whom he put to death; "their garments he took away, and gave to them that had declared the riddle." * The world manages its affairs much in the same way. There is no readier means for it to clothe one person than by denuding another. It presents Mardochai with the administration of a noble monarchy; but it gives it him by first taking it from Aman. It inducts Siba into the possession of an extensive property; but it does it by first taking

* Judg. xiv. 19.

it from Miphibosheth. It institutes Sadoc to a glorious priesthood; but it does it by first taking it from Abiathar. And so we may go on quoting examples to the same effect; and the conclusion we come to is this—that the world acts very like those gardeners who, being obliged to supply a fountain for the amusement of certain foreigners curious to see the water-works, do it by turning the cock and raising the supply they want by cunningly defrauding some other fountain. How, then, can you repose any confidence in the world? When you least expect it, with the utmost facility it will disappoint you; often, too, that it may enrich, out of your property, some far less deserving object, some flatterer, some pushing person, some informer, some one who contrives to raise himself by those crooked and roundabout ways which ought in truth to be the longest, but yet are too frequently found in the world the most expeditious.

5. More, however, is yet to be said. For if the world would only forewarn you in time of the mischief it was forced to do you, it might perhaps be somewhat excused. But the worst of it is that, in the character of a thorough traitor, it loves to attack you quite by surprise, and to fail you, as we say, just at the nick of time; I mean the time of your fullest prosperity or of your most urgent need. The prophet Jonas sought for rest under the shelter of a fresh verdant ivy, which, having gently sprouted over his head, made him a most luxurious rural arbor. But what good came of it? When, overjoyed with this, the poor man thought of reclining under its shade—for he was “exceeding glad of the ivy” *—the plant all of a sudden withered away, and he was left naked and exposed to the strokes of the raging mid-day sun. And could I but

* Jonas iv. 6.

enumerate, one after another, the many instances in which men have been imposed upon by this deceitful world, oh! the fine ivies—and even the grand laurels, too—I should have to set before you, all of them of a sudden dried up over their heads!

Titus Celsus, from being a private soldier in Africa, was, through the interest chiefly of two powerful men, Pomponianus and Possienus, raised by the acclamations of the army to be emperor. Yet—can we believe it?—scarcely had seven days elapsed since his accession to power, than, the scene suddenly shifting, he was put to death by these very persons who had promoted him, his only fault being his over-confidence in the popular favor. Thus Galba, thus Otho, thus Vitellius, thus Emilianus, thus Pertinax, thus Florian, thus Tacitus, thus Numerianus, did not enjoy the imperial power beyond the space of a single year; the sceptre, to their no small discredit, slipping out of their hands just at the time when they flattered themselves they were grasping it with most tenacity. How much to be pitied was Jovianus! A more religious, a more discreet, a more benevolent prince the earth could never hope to see. On his being saluted Emperor by the people, he immediately went to Constantinople, there to assume the reins of government; when on his way he had to sleep in a room that had been newly whitewashed; this sufficed to cause his death during the night, for he was suffocated by the vapors of the charcoal kept burning on the preceding day to dry the room. Valerian contrived to reign a little longer; but what good did it do him when he found himself reduced by necessity to the slavish office of becoming a footstool to Sapor, the King of Persia, as he proudly mounted his charger? Those four kings, too—I want some one to remind me of their names—were able to retain their power

for a somewhat longer period ; but what good did it do them when, taken prisoners soon after by Sesostris, King of Egypt, they were compelled to act as his carriage-horses when he made his pompous appearance in the triumphal car ? So true is the fact, no height of majesty has been exempted from any, even the greatest, ridicule.

Examples might here be adduced without end. History is full of them ; hence St. Chrysostom felt no scruple in declaring that not a single earthly enjoyment contains any substance—"nothing firm, nothing stable"—but, contrary-wise, that it will dry up, like a deceitful stream, just at the time when one, like Elias, has contrived with great difficulty to reach its banks, there to rest one's self in peace, and to spend one's remaining days under the cool, tranquillizing influence of its fresh air and its gentle murmurs. "We have looked for the time of healing, and behold trouble." * Was I wrong, then, my hearers, in telling you that the world fails us just at the nick of time, that it fails us at our prime, that it fails us at our zenith, or, to borrow the words of St. Peter Damian, that "it troubles those soonest whom it flatters" ? Oh ! its guile. Oh ! its double dealing. Oh ! its treachery. If this be not to act a traitor's part, what is ? Why, the world seems, in my view of it, to be another Vesuvius ; it favors the wish you have to cultivate its lower grounds by offering you harvests full of joy, with genial springs, fine autumns, and never-failing plenty. But what of this ? At such an hour as you least apprehend from its innermost entrails it rains down such an awfully destructive flood of sulphur, bitumen, ashes, and stones that the entire produce of a series of past years is clean swept away. "The affliction of an hour"—how suited is the language of the preacher!—"maketh a man forget great delights." † And have

* Jer. xiv. 19.

† Eccclus. xi. 20.

you a mind still to fix your habitation at the foot of this treacherous Vesuvius, there to reside, there to live at your ease? Isaias, having predicted the calamities of Babylon, declared that henceforth the Arabs would have no wish to station themselves on that spot, "neither shall the Arabian pitch his tents there,"* that the shepherds would no more lead their flocks for repose to that situation, that the ploughmen would no more return thither as to a place suited to their labors. And you would not only pitch your tent, but even raise up on high your palaces in this world. No, no, my brethren, "Flee ye from the midst of Babylon, and let every one save his own life."† For the land before you is not, as you suppose, your friend—no, 'tis a land of assassins.

6. I understand the reason why your minds are so easily dazzled by the world. Those melancholy reverses that I told you we must expect in it are invariably ascribed to any other cause than its own intrinsic treachery. Such a one died quite young, it is true; but then it was owing to his intemperance and the little care he took of his health. Another lost his popularity; but then it was owing to his indiscreet way of talking. Another lost all his money; but then it was owing to his reckless manner in business. Another was deserted by his friend; but then it was owing to his not making himself more amiable. Thus the world will never admit that those reverses which overtake its votaries have arisen from any want on its part of fidelity towards them, as though it were the guilty person, but from some want on their part of attention to their own interests, as though they were the most imprudent among men. And yet does not this very fact show more clearly its perfidy? Traitors study nothing so much as they do secrecy. Every

* Isaias xlii. 9.

† Jer. li. 6.

trick and every practice of theirs turns on this point; for were they once to allow themselves guilty of any damage inflicted, who would ever trust them for the future? Few behave with the openness of that great captain, Joab, who, after he had most basely and treacherously murdered two valiant warriors, Abner and Amasa, plumed himself for this achievement to such a degree that he quite enamelled his proud military girdle with their blood. ‘He put the blood of war upon his girdle.’* Traitors, for the most part, don’t do this; they generally let fly the dart, and then run away to cover; if questioned, they deny; if convicted, they swear to a falsehood; and, if they find it beyond their power to conceal what they have done, they have a thousand subterfuges at hand to serve their ends, as we read in the Book of Proverbs: “The man that hurteth his friend deceitfully, and when he is taken, saith: I did it in jest.”† What wonder, then, is it that the world should never be without some new pretext or another to color over its impostures? But these are mere pretexts, my hearers; and, therefore, I again urge on you to place no trust in them. Hate rather and abhor them, and never believe, however devoutly you may engage in the service of the world, and strictly observe its orders and maxims, that it will ever treat you better for all your pains than it has done other people before you. No; would you prevail upon the world to show you any kind of respect, you must treat it in quite a contrary way. You must show it no respect, you must tread and trample it under foot, you must pay no manner of regard to its smiles. By how much more persons desperately cling to it, by so much more sooner or later will it ill-treat them; and they will verify in their persons the remark of St. John Damascen, that the world hates that

* 3 Kings ii. 5.

† Prov. xxvi. 29.

man who attaches to it the highest value. "The world is an adversary to its friends."

7. It is indeed a most extraordinary fact, but quite true. If ever the world suffered ill-usage from any particular class of persons, who were they? They were good and holy men. These were the persons to fall foul of it, to censure it both in their speeches and writings, to make a mock of all its offers of pleasures, riches, honors, and every other kind of temporal prosperity. And yet these are the very persons whom the world now honors with its remembrance. "The memory of the just is with praises."* The world has known more than one Alexius, whom it constantly remembers; a man who exposed it to open scorn by forsaking his paternal roof more than a thousand years ago. It remembers more than one Bernard, who despised its pleasures; more than one Francis, who despised its riches; more than one Romuald, who, sooner than gain its honors, submitted to the most intolerable hardship. Now, these are the men whom the world admires as being something above the common run; these it will honor and applaud, loading them with every high mark and tribute of its respect. "The memory of the just is with praises." Do we not see it with our eyes? Their *memory*, beyond doubt, is *blessed*. But what, meanwhile, becomes of those who so tenderly caress and esteem the world? Why, the world makes them at times its laughing-stock, and sets them down as so many shallow, interested, ambitious, unprincipled, worthless characters. "The name of the wicked shall rot."

That golden image which Nabuchodonosor erected to represent his supreme majesty is everywhere famous. Having assembled around it the different states of his

* Prov. x. 7.

empire, both civil and military, he commanded that, at the first sound of a great variety of musical instruments, all must fall down and worship it. In this vast assembly only three young men were to be found who dared to despise this royal edict. Protesting openly against such a ceremony, and expressing a detestation of such a worship, they would sooner go into a furnace, hot as hell-fire, than comply. "Be it known to thee, O king! that we will not worship thy gods, nor adore the golden statue which thou hast set up."* Now who, pray, were the persons whom this same king at last came to honor? Whom did he advance? Whom did he make his favorites? Was it those who were so ready at once to fall down and pay him such vile adoration? Most assuredly not. But these young men who had despised him—these were the persons prominently selected for this honor. For, from their not having felt the fire, the king, knowing them to be in favor with God, by a new edict promoted them to a dignity as lofty as could well be desired. "After he saw them standing up and nobly erect, he had them proclaimed, and crowned them; and this he did for no other reason"—I am giving you the fine observation of St. Chrysostom—"for no other reason than because they had despised him." Now, this is precisely what the world is imitating every day before our eyes. Those who are so impatient to bow themselves down before its image, it afterwards neglects; while those who, so far from complying with its worship, would rather enter the furnace, however hot, of pain, disgrace, and persecution, it honors. How great, therefore, must be the error of your supposing that the world, for the best services you can render it, will, under any circumstances, repay you in thanks and favor! No, sirs, it will

* Dan. iii. 18.

always prove itself faithless towards you, always treacherous, always ungrateful. Stoop and cringe before it as you will, your homage will be all thrown away—all thrown away on a mere traitor.

8. I have more to say ; for sincerely from my very heart I pity you if ever you lend yourself in earnest to serve the world. To serve the world ! to serve the world ! Oh ! the imposition of heavy laws you must then submit to, and the oppressive burdens you will have to bear, far more oppressive than any to be borne in the service of Christ ! I can sympathize with you in the words of the prophet : "Thou hast broken chains of wood, and thou shalt make for them chains of iron." * Mind whether what I say is not true ; for this is a very material point in my argument ; by it I hope to win the day. Unquestionably Christ does impose strict laws on His servants ; they must forgive and forbear, and submit and humble themselves, and deny themselves. Oh ! the severe requisition ! I grant it ; but then, we are perfectly sure that when Christ demands such things of us, He will, together with His demand, give us the strength to perform them. "God is faithful," St. Paul declares, "who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able." † He will assist us as he did a Stephen, exposed to a hurricane of stones. He will strengthen us as He did an Antony, abandoned to a multitude of devils. We have, therefore, no ground to complain ; because, as St. Leo most excellently laid it down, "He, who prevents us with His assistance, has a good right to urge upon us His demands." But the world does not treat us so. The world says, Hast thou been affronted ? If thou wouldst preserve thy character, thou art bound at once to revenge the affront ; for this is my law.

* Jer. xxviii. 13.

† 1 Cor. x. 13.

And so it urges its demand, but does not prevent with its assistance; for it gives thee no means of taking thy revenge, it gives thee not money to hire assassins with or to increase thy own body-guard. So the upshot of the matter will be this: If thou art poor, thou wilt get thyself into trouble, have to sell thy little property, to break up thy household, and peradventure, after all, to live in perpetual altercation. Sad indeed for thee! "They are cruel," Jeremias exclaims, "and will have no mercy." * The world says, Art thou a nobleman? Thou must therefore make a grand appearance, keep thy carriages and horses, have a gay, splendid livery; and so it urges the demand, but does not prevent with its assistance; for it gives thee not the means of supporting such an establishment. The world says, Art thou a merchant? Thou must therefore maintain good credit, engage houses and farms, keep up an extensive correspondence; and so it urges its demand, but does not prevent with its assistance; for it gives thee no capital sufficient for such an expense. The world says, Art thou a courtier? Thou must therefore please thy patron, press forward in securing favor and popularity, or, at least, not suffer thyself to be outstripped by any new candidate; and so it urges its demand, but does not prevent with its assistance; for it gives thee not the talent, the knowledge, the tact, the sagacity, necessary to this success.

Every enquiry we can here make will end in convincing us that the world treats its servants just as Pharaoh treated the wretched Hebrews in Egypt in the worst days of their bondage. He required of them daily toil and hard labor; they must build him hot baths, they must raise him fortifications, they must make him entire new cities. "Thus saith Pharaoh, I allow you no straw; go, and gather it where

* Jer. vi. 23.

you can find it: neither shall anything of your work be diminished." * Pharaoh requires hard work, but gives no straw. And such precisely is the behavior of the world. It is urgent with its demand, but it does not prevent with its assistance. And are you so far besotted as to wish to devote yourselves to a master so cruel, not to say so faithless—one who is so false, so imposing, as I undertook to prove? Ah! my blessed Lord, what poor blind creatures are we mortal men, who will sooner bow down under "chains of iron"—for such is the treacherous world's dominion over us—than bear a yoke which, by Thine own report, is so *sweet and light*! Never let this be true of us—never! If any one is at liberty to do so, let him now immediately renounce the world, let him make his escape, let him throw himself into the arms of Christ, who, in order to provide him shelter, has opened so many cloisters as the surest cities of refuge, where he will be safe. Let him take to himself that advice of the Preacher, "Go to the side of the holy age," † and no longer live under the delusion of those who, as Jeremias lamented, are so wedded to a lie that they cannot divorce themselves from it: "They have laid hold on lying, and have refused to return." ‡ Let him open his eyes to his past error, let him reflect upon his present danger; now that his foot is yet at liberty, and he is free to make his escape, let him not put on the chain, let him not submit to so vile a bondage. "Give not thine honor to strangers and thy years to the cruel." §

THE SECOND PART.

9. I anticipate already what you will say. You will impute to me a design, in this sermon, of emptying the

* Ez. v. 22.

† Eccles. xvii. 25.

‡ Jer. viii. 5.

§ Prov. v. 9.

world of its inhabitants, and of banishing every one of you to seek sanctuary in some Camaldoli or Chartreuse, or mid the horrors of some more rigid Alvernia. I should think myself happy indeed could I do this for you; but who am I in the sight of God to presume upon anything of the kind? However, beloved hearers, be assured of this. The truth I have stated this morning—the discovery that the world is a traitor—has induced very many to hate and abhor it. This is the truth which has peopled our cloisters with monks, which has filled our groves with hermits, from a strong conviction in their minds of the egregious folly it must ever prove to trust the smiles of one who has broken faith with all. “From that which is false,” according to Ecclesiasticus, “what truth can come?”* You must not, however, suppose me to have lost sight of your state in life, generally, as it prevents you, either from age or from profession, from entirely renouncing the world. And in this case, what have people to do? Must they sink in despair, and die of a broken heart? Not so; they have merely to follow implicitly what I now advise them. Let them set foot upon the earth, exactly as the birds of the air do upon the ground. You have noticed the manner in which these tender little things alight in some field to pick up seed, or near some river to get a drop of water. Well aware of their being in a land not to be trusted, where snares and springs are set on every side to catch them, they tarry no longer on the dangerous spot than necessity requires; and, even during the short time they allow themselves, they are ever on the watch, ever spying to the right and left. There they stand, anxious, timorous, suspicious; and no sooner have they once picked up the seed, than off they go, winging their rapid flight in the air.

* Eccclus. xxxiv. 4.

This teaches you what you have to do, that, according to the Apostle Paul's rule, you may so "use this world as if they used it not";* in other words, you must not in any wise set your affection upon it, must not entertain any leaning or attachment towards it, must not place the least confidence in it; briefly, you must so treat the world as persons conscious that they were dealing with a traitor would do—that is, with the utmost imaginable caution. What a blessed guide is this to our conduct, my hearers! How wise! How sure to promote our safety and happiness! So great, truly, is my anxiety that every one among you should follow it that I shall now, in conclusion, present it to you under a more luminous aspect, by telling you what befell that illustrious son of the Dominican Order—Henry Suso.

10. He was once on a pilgrimage from Lower to Upper Germany, where he had to traverse a certain forest, not so formidable on account of the wild boars and bears that infested it, as rendered infamous by the many murders which had been committed within its precincts. Entering this forest as it began to get late, he sees advancing to meet him a robber of most terrible stature, aspect, and gesture. The robber was armed with a scimitar at his side and a javelin in his hand; he gives him a scrutinizing look, and thus accosts him: "Stop, father, thou art to all appearance a good, honest man; I wish to confess to thee." Henry, on hearing this, understood it to express the secret design the man had to draw him away to some more lonely part of the forest, and then, with less danger of detection, to murder him. Dreadfully shaken with a thousand dismal thoughts, he knew not how to decide. Should he go? What a risk! Should he try to escape? How useless!

* 1 Cor. vii. 31.

Should he cry out for help? Nothing more rash! In such an agony of bewilderment, he conceived his best course would be to commend himself heartily to God's protection, and then to go with the assassin; who forthwith, as he marched alongside of him, began to say, "Father, are you aware that I have been living for many years in this forest, where my occupation is to rob all passers-by, and then to cut them in pieces and leave them to the wolves?" Only conceive what Henry's feelings were on his hearing this. Contriving, however, to the best of his power, to keep his countenance, "Well," he rejoined, "proceed with your confession." And so the robber continued. "There," said he, "a little further on, under that elm, I strangled a woman. On this very spot where we are now standing"—it was on a high, steep bank of the Rhine, which rolled its deep, black waters through the forest—"here, I tell you, I once chanced to meet a priest, a venerable-looking man like thyself, and I proposed to confess my sins to him. I did so, and scarcely had I received his absolution, when a sudden suspicion crossed my mind that he might go and inform against me before some magistrate. To secure myself, therefore, against all possibility of this, I thought it best at once to run him through with this sword, and then, with a good kick, to send him headlong over this precipice into the water." Alas! at this, poor Henry felt almost a dead man. He glanced his eyes quickly to see whether the assassin's hand was getting near his sword; his legs gave way under him; his cold sweat, his languid eye, his deadly paleness, so vividly expressed his horrible consternation that such a savage as this must surely have melted at the sight, had he not at that very time been truly and inwardly moved by the grace of God, and been now really in earnest. Indeed, when he had finished his confession in the best manner he

could, he thanked Henry for his services, accompanied him further through the forest, paid him great honor, and asked, before he parted company, to be remembered in his prayers; and through his instrumentality, we are told, the assassin was most graciously saved.

You learn from this story how a man shall behave if obliged to have any dealings with an assassin. He only deals at all with him because he has no other choice; it gives him pain, he suffers for it, and is continually commending himself to the protection of the Almighty. He is in a constant palpitation and alarm from the suspicion on his mind of some cheat being practised upon him, which at any time may take him unawares. Just so should you behave in your intercourse with the world. The world too, could it be brought to make a general confession of its sins, ought to plead guilty of being a desperate robber, whose only occupation in this mighty forest of the universe is to murder people, and to such an infinite extent that it would be very imprudent to oblige it, in confession, to state their precise number. Still, it ought to confess that it once allured a giddy young man, such as Absalom, with a bright prospect of crowns and sceptres, and then betrayed him, and left him to die under the thick boughs of a great oak, to which he was tied by the hairs of his head, with three darts lodged in his heart. It ought to confess that on another tree it hung up that chief counsellor of David, Achitophel, whom it wickedly seduced from his allegiance by the tempting bait of worldly advancement. It ought to confess that on another tree it suspended that chief favorite of Assuerus, Aman, whom it maliciously excited to crush a rival to advance himself. It ought likewise to confess the unheard-of felonious cruelty with which it treated a certain son of Jambri, mentioned in the first Book of Machabees;

for, having persuaded him to return home, he lay in ambush by the way, as the poor man, in the joy of his heart, was conducting his bride from a neighboring city, accompanied by a noble retinue; and then overtook him in a forest, where it delivered him to a large party of his enemies, who massacred him, and left him stripped, plundered, and naked on the public road. These and other still more monstrous assassinations, committed, too, on persons of your own grade in life, the world ought, one by one, to recount to you, if only willing, with the robber just mentioned, to confess the truth; and therefore consider well the course you ought to take. "See that you walk circumspectly." * See whether you should embrace every offer or close with every proposal the world makes you.

The world is that special "enemy," described in Ecclesiasticus, whom we are "never to trust." Let him pretend as he may; let him fawn and pay court; this will not do, sirs. "Though he humble himself, and go crouching, yet take good heed, and beware of him; set him not by thee, . . . lest he turn into thy place." † Do I make myself understood? Trust not a flattering exterior, in smiles and simpers, pretty words, fine speeches, and winning looks; trust not one of them, but be rather more circumspect on this account. "Take heed, . . . for thou walkest in danger of thy ruin." ‡ And if circumstances prevent your entirely renouncing the world, be careful, as St. Chrysostom said, not to form too close a friendship with it. "Love not the world, love not the world;" § for the world is a traitor—a traitor of no ordinary stamp—a furious, a pestilent, a most unscrupulous traitor, who longs to do you the greatest possible mischief. Dalila betrayed Samson into the hands

* Eph. v. 15.

† Eccles. xiii. 16.

‡ Eccles. xii. 20 22.

§ 1 St. John ii. 15.

of the Philistines. Doeg betrayed Achimelech into the hands of Saul. Judas betrayed Jesus Christ into the hands of the chief priests of the temple. But this traitor I speak of, only give him the opportunity, would consign each individual among us into the hands of far more deadly enemies—even the dominion of hell. And do we, nevertheless, still dearly love the world? Oh! the wonder, to find a traitor possessing such powers of pleasing; ay, of pleasing the very persons who know him to be a traitor! Surely in this case the greater blame must not rest with the betrayer, but with him who suffers himself to be betrayed.

SERMON XII.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE GREATEST SINNERS TO BECOME THE GREATEST SAINTS.

"And He said to her, Thy sins are forgiven thee; . . . go in peace."—ST. LUKE vii. 48, 50.

1. Happy Magdalene, whose lot it was to have offended a Lord so full of love that He was pacified at once by an act of humiliation, and won over at the easy cost of a few tears! Supposing her to have in the same way offended that Pharisee under whose roof the event of this day's Gospel took place as much as she had offended Christ, think you the Pharisee would have received her as Christ did? The poor creature might have provided herself with as many perfumes, have decked herself out with as many jewels, as she liked; for on her appearing before him in this abrupt manner, taking him quite by surprise, no previous notice given, no favor of an audience requested before, coming, too, into his very dining-room, and at the very height of the festivity, he would have flamed with indignation against her. In his transport of rage and fury, he would have darted from his seat for fear of being polluted by her touch, and "What, wicked woman," he would have exclaimed, "what brings you here? What an intrusion, what an impertinence, what presumption is this! This is no haunt of vice; mine is no house of bad repute, with doors open at all times to receive the profligate."

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gate. For you to come under my roof; you to force yourself into these rooms; you to make your appearance before such an honorable company! Begone, insolent slut, begone, that the air may not be corrupted with the horrid stench of your impurities. We shall indeed require much more than your fine perfumes and ointment to sweeten it again. Pray keep to yourself those tears you can so readily command for the wicked purpose of decoying your numerous followers. Am I the person to be tricked by your fascinations? Am I the person to believe in your amorous sighs? Take care, I warn you never again to venture your foot on my premises; and consider whether I am the person to allow you to speak to me, and much less to offer me your endearments."

Such, in all probability, would have been her reception and welcome by the Pharisee, had she been required to implore his forgiveness. St. Augustine here wisely remarks, "If she had approached the feet of the Pharisee, he would have bidden her begone." And, in fact, we here read that—though he did not resent her conduct—he was highly scandalized at the gracious entertainment Christ gave her, and at a loss how to exculpate Him on this account, though he taxed Him with ignorance alone. "This man, if He were a prophet, would know surely who and what kind of woman this is that toucheth Him."* Christ, on the other hand, abating not a jot, for all the Pharisee's murmurings, of His own tender loving-kindness, with what gentleness did He receive her! With what firmness did He take her part! With what readiness did He forgive her sin, not requiring even a single act of penance! Nor did this alone content Him, for he immediately raised her to so high a place in His service, friendship, and confidence that, with

* St. Luke vii. 39.

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the exception of Mary the Virgin, no woman had a nearer place in His heart than had Mary the sinner.

This extraordinary display of the Lord's mercy quite prevents my making use this morning of any severe language. It compels me to convert this sermon, which from its subject should be one of reproof, into a sermon of consolation. Those miserable beings who are quite hardened in a course of sin, and become irreclaimable—who are resolved, in spite of all God's goodness towards them, to ruin their own souls—must here excuse me, for I have no wish in preaching to them to waste my time, but gladly indeed would I comfort and strengthen the souls of a different class of persons—of those, I mean, who are most sincerely and earnestly desirous to devote themselves for the future to the alone service of God, but who, from their deep conviction and overpowering sense of the enormity of their past sins, despair of ever becoming pure and holy. Say not so; far be it from them to yield so easily to any such desponding thoughts; let them rather dismiss every fear of the kind, and give me their closest attention, as I propose to demonstrate that a holy life has no greater difficulties for them than it has for their betters.

2. To obviate any idea you may have that I am proposing something unreal and visionary, rather than true and practical, understand well the truth of which I would convince you. It is nothing less than this: that you yourselves, the persons here sitting before me—persons, some of whom have been, perhaps, carried away by the mad excesses of love or vindictive hatred; you, whose hands may have been recently stained with murderous blood; you, who are the victims of pride; you, who are the slaves of avarice; you, who are immersed in sensuality; yes, even such as you may not only obtain the immediate forgiveness of all your

flagrant iniquities, but may also obtain such a fulness of grace on earth, and such an eminence of glory in heaven, as will leave you no room to envy the condition of others who never ran into your excess of wickedness.

But pray be very careful here not to mistake me. I am far from asserting that you can ever reach this eminence by the unassisted efforts of your own natural will and power. Your condition would indeed be desperate were you to ground your hopes on any such efforts. You would be lost without remedy, and, so far from attaining to that exalted holiness I mentioned, you would be unable to raise your souls from the depths of sin in which you are plunged. But take courage, ye dear sinners, whom I love in the Lord. In a work so arduous and important you will not be left to yourselves; no, you are to be with God, and God is to be with you. And when aided by an omnipotent arm, what may you not hope to accomplish? St. Bernard has assured you that "what is impossible to us by our own nature becomes possible and even easy to us by God's good grace." This he knew from his own experience. Others have found it so as well as he. Tell me, now, suppose some one endowed with the gift of prophecy had sought out St. Mary of Egypt at the time that she, beautiful and vain, was the idol of all Alexandria, and had said to her, "Woman, listen to me; the time will come when you will not only reject all ease and amusement, but also, in the midst of a horrible wilderness, will lead the life which I will now set before you. For forty-seven years you will not see a single human face; but, surrounded by wolves, bears, lions, and tigers, you will prefer their society to that of your present companions. You will take only three loaves with you to the desert; and these, hard and stale, will serve for your food for sixteen years. When these are

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consumed, you will live like a wild beast on the grass of the field and the water of the marshes, until you learn to live without any sustenance whatever. Besides, having no roof to shelter you, or warm garments to clothe you, you shall shiver in the piercing cold of the winter nights, and be scorched in summer by the burning rays of the noonday sun. As for your eyes, you will be so unmerciful to them that, after granting them one hour of sleep, you will make them run with tears day and night; and the scanty sleep which you will take will be such as sharp rocks or thorny bushes may allow. You will strike and tear yourself continually with your hands, with pointed stones, or with brambles. This I predict to you; and, believe me, you will do it all." Tell me, my hearers, if you had gone and talked thus to this great saint at that time, what credit would your words have met with? Would not she have laughed at any one who had undertaken to persuade her of such a future? "How?" she would have said. "I am not to eat, not to drink, not to sleep, not to talk or laugh for so many years? It cannot be; no, no. 'My strength is not the strength of stones, nor is my flesh of brass.'* I would rather die than adopt such a life." Yet it is certain, my hearers, that she did choose it; and, thanks to the grace of God, not only did it not appear to her impossible or even wearisome, but easy and full of joy, as she confessed to the Abbot Zosimus, to whom, when manifesting her soul at the hour of death, she was able to say, "Let this be my comfort, that, afflicting me with sorrow, He spare not."† Why, then, tell me of your despairing to reach any exalted state of holiness? You are wrong in thinking so meanly of yourself, very wrong; and I will give you my reason for saying so. Your state now, as sinners, quite disqualifies

* Job vi. 12.

† Job vi. 10.

you from forming a correct estimate of what you will then be when you are once strengthened and confirmed in a state of grace. Yet why should this thought trouble you? Many things which a person in health is capable of performing, seem impossible, quite impossible, to a man in sickness; as to run, to leap, to wrestle, to skip, and to dance. Let the sick man only recover his health, and he will do every one of them. "Thou canst not follow Me now,"* said our Lord once pointedly to St. Peter, at the time of his greatest weakness—"thou canst not follow Me now"; and this was as good as telling him—so, indeed, St. Augustine strikingly commented upon it—"Thou shalt recover thy health, and 'follow Me.'" Indeed, you will then possess quite another power, another spirit, another courageous heart, when the full tide of the divine consolations shall enlarge your soul, when not in a mist, as now, but in a steady, clear light, you shall discern the vanity of earthly things, the solid substance of things eternal; when the devil shall no longer dare tempt you, when heaven itself shall be at strife in heaping favors upon you, when the service of God shall so agree with your taste as really to become to you a new and second nature.

3. Does it surprise you to see how the wild goat scampers over the cliff with so much agility as not to leave a print of his foot behind him; or to see how the partridge flies aloft with so much velocity as to defy the arrow winged after him from the bow? Every one at first sight would say that these poor creatures must be bathed in perspiration, or quite spent with fatigue at the end of their journey, as if it had proved a sore labor. And yet they have hardly felt it at all, because it accords with the nature of the wild goat to run, and of the partridge to fly. What man among

* St. John xiii. 36.

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us would not soon turn to corruption, had he to live under ground? And yet the mole thrives there, because he finds it natural. Who of us would not soon be suffocated, had he to live under the water? And yet the fish prospers there, because he finds it natural. Who of us would not soon be dust and ashes, had he to expose himself in the flames? And yet the salamander enjoys them, because he finds it natural. Thus no one experiences any pain, but rather pleasure, as Aristotle teaches, in performing those actions which correspond with his nature. "Whatever is natural is pleasant."

Could you, then, raise yourself to that temper of mind when acts of repentance, of contrition, and of devotion would all become quite natural to you, would they not be—I say not merely possible—but really delightful to you? Certainly they would. Well, be now assured that the helps you will derive from grace are in a far higher degree efficacious. For we find, on consideration, that the ability derived from nature alone is, after all, so defective and limited that in process of time, by over-work, it becomes exhausted; hence the partridge will get weak by over-exerting his wings, and the wild goat by over-exerting his legs. Not so in regard to divine grace. Not only does this never exhaust itself by exercise—like as *Isaias* declared of the righteous, "They shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" *—but by this means it strengthens itself; so that the more a man runs, the more he labors in the way of God's commandments, the more facility and readiness he acquires thereby. Nay, more than this. Observe what *St. Ambrose* asserted on this doctrine. He declares that a good man will sometimes reach a point at which vice becomes more difficult to practise than virtue.

* *Isaias* xl. 31.

"Virtue, as we make progress, becomes so easy that it is harder for us to do ill than to do well." It is more difficult for him to cease from prayer than to continue many hours in prayer; it is more difficult for him to neglect penitential exercises than to perform them with strict severity.

Some writers have made a weighty reflection on the character of the patriarch Abraham; it comes in quite opportunely as a proof of my doctrine. It is this: In order to send him quickly about the sacrifice of his son, it sufficed that the Lord should simply notice to him His will. "He said unto him, Abraham;" * but in order to draw him off from this sacrifice, it was necessary that the Lord should cry to him with a loud and earnest voice. "He called to him from heaven, saying, Abraham! Abraham!" So true it is, as these writers observe, that more pains are requisite to restrain a true servant of God from a good act than at first to incite him to it. Why, then, do you harbor any doubt of your inability to reach a certain degree of holiness, however advanced, so long as your dependence for help rests not upon the power of an enfeebled, drooping nature, but on that of an Almighty, unwearied grace?

It is true that you have to ascend with Elias the most inaccessible summit of Horeb; but then, it will be in the virtue of that most substantial nutriment, which will impart strength to your innermost soul. It is true that you have to traverse with Eliseus the most rapid current of Jordan; but then, it will be in the virtue of that most hallowed Name, which will open a path for you in the midst of the waters. You have—what more could you have? You have to mount by a ladder as lofty and precipitous as the one exhibited to Jacob. This cannot be denied. Yet this need cause you no alarm whatever; because God himself,

* Gen. xxii. 1.

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with **His** own hand, will hold the ladder steady for your ascent, so that there will be no danger of your falling. "The Lord was leaning upon the ladder." * For can you believe any of the saints to have ever reached perfection by his own virtue? No, no, says David; "neither did their own arm save them." † They were all frail and feeble, like as we are; all moulded of the same clay, all compounded of the same flesh with ourselves. Divine grace alone rendered them mighty. "The right hand of the Lord hath wrought strength." ‡ Be therefore of good courage, sinners, beloved in the Lord; be of good courage, I say. You have only in true good earnest to make up your minds this morning that you will be saints, and saints you are. "Through God we shall do mightily, and He will bring our enemies to nothing." § "Through God will we do mightily; and He shall bring to nothing them that afflict us." ||

4. Perhaps you will say, How can such a sinner as I know whether God is willing to give me this highly efficacious grace? How can you know? Alas! that such a speech, so utterly ill-advised, should ever have escaped your lips! Let me tell you that by your distrust of God, as evinced in this question, you cause Him perhaps more heavy displeasure than by all the excesses of your past abandoned life. And why cannot you believe Him to be quite as willing to admit you as He does others into His service—on the same intimate, cordial, and familiar terms—provided you yourself think fit to be so admitted? Has He not, then, poured out a river of blood as plenteously for you as He did for any of His chosen friends? Did not you cost Him as dear as did Pelagia of Antioch, or Thais the Egyptian, or William of Aquitaine, or Augustine? Not

* Gen. xxviii. 13.

§ Ps. cvii. 14.

† Ps. xlii. 4.

‡ Ps. cxvii. 14.

| Ps. lix. 14.

a jot more suffering did He endure for them than for any among yourselves. Of you—even of your very name—was He mindful when He let drop His blood in the garden; of you when He was writhing on the cross; of you when He sighed, when He groaned, when He mourned, when “offering up prayers and supplications with a strong cry and tears”; * for you as well as for others did He weep so bitterly. As, then, He paid down an equal price for you, why this fear that He does not equally regard you? I admit that you have made Him a most ungrateful return for all the dreadful villanies He suffered for your sakes. I consider this, and I lament that it should be so; still, in spite of this, it may be questioned whether you have treated Him worse than a Peter did, who denied Him; and yet how dear to Jesus was this Peter afterwards! Or than a Paul did, who persecuted Him; and yet how pleasing to Jesus was this Paul afterwards! And what if you have treated Him worse, ay, much worse, you are still blessed in this, that you have not to deal with men, but with God. And God has expressly given us to understand by Osee, “I will not execute the fierceness of My wrath, because I am God, and not man.” †

You are conscious, we will say, that you have grievously injured a fellow-creature. The offence you gave him, in process of time, may have passed away; the matter may have been made up between you, and a reconciliation openly brought to pass; still, in consequence of what has happened, you can never afterwards feel on terms of entire confidence with him. And, to say the truth, I cannot in this wholly blame you. For as iron, even when polished, has an aptitude in resuming its old rust; and as a fire-brand, even when extinguished, has a disposition to re-

Heb. v. 7.

† Osee xl. 9.

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kindle its former flame ; and as the sea, even when becalmed, has a tendency to return to its natural swell—so an enemy, although reconciled, is easily led to revive the former feeling of dislike. Now, this fact will account for the conduct of David. When a young man, as remarkable for the prudence as for the gentleness of his character, he certainly more than once pardoned Saul, and showed an excellent spirit in doing so, Saul being at the time actually on his way to kill him. He pardoned him in the cave, when he was able, with safety to himself, to cut off the skirt of his garment. He pardoned him in the tent, when he could easily remove the spear from his pillow. But, in consequence of this, he never afterwards trusted himself entirely in his hands, for all the entreaties which Saul, when brought to evident repentance and compunction for the past, with tears in his eyes made to him, nor for all the strong assurances he gave him, on the word of a king, that he would never persecute him for the future. So true is it, as St. Augustine said, that no reconciliation ever effected between man and man can be regarded as quite sure and perfect. “Forgiveness among men is always in some way defective.” But is it so in our dealings with God ? No, no ; the saint goes on to say : “For God so completely forgives us as never afterwards to chastise us by taking revenge, nor put us to shame by reproaching us, nor to love us the less by placing our sins to our account.” Yes, in Him we may indeed repose our full, implicit confidence ; for He is a God who will never feel aggrieved by our wickednesses that are past, when He observes how they cause us at the present nothing but the severest pain.

Search the Gospel attentively as I can, and over and over again, I can nowhere find a single instance of Christ's having spoken a single harsh word to any one, under any

circumstance, about his past offences—not to Magdalene for her impurities, not to Matthew for his extortions, not to Zacchæus for his over-reaching, not to Peter for his perfidy, not to Thomas for his unbelief. And when He would reprove the infidel city Jerusalem for her transgressions, a commentator has observed the caution and reluctance with which He set about it, saying, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee!” * Now, why was this? Had not Jerusalem in times past *stoned* and *killed* a far greater number of the prophets than in those days when Christ used these words? Assuredly she had. Nevertheless, He did not say that *hast killed* and *hast stoned*, but He said that *killest* and *stonest*; because God does not take into His account offences past that are already forgiven, but only offences present which remain to be pardoned.

It is perfectly impossible that those magnificent promises should all end in nothing; those, I mean, which He made us by the mouth of His prophets; as, for instance, declaring at one time that He would “cast all our sins into the bottom of the sea,” † that they should never rise to view on the surface, or that He would scatter and cause them to disappear, and “blot them out as a cloud,” ‡ or, more clearly still, that He would attach no more weight to them than if we had never committed them. “I will have mercy upon them, and they shall be as they were when I had not cast them off.” § This is not the ordinary mode of proceeding among men. A father loves most tenderly that son who has invariably obeyed him, and looks stern at the son who has been wild and stubborn. A prince favors most highly those subjects who have been invariably loyal,

* St. Matt. xxiii. 37.

† Isa. xlv. 22.

‡ Mich. vii. 19.

§ Zach. x. 6.

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and looks cool at those who have been inclined to rebel. A captain most freely indulges those soldiers who have been invariably faithful to him, and is more strict with those who have been disposed to mutiny. But not so God, as the prelate St. Gregory declares. Had we in times past been always unfaithful, disloyal, disobedient to Him, it would deduct nothing from the regard, the favor, the affection He will bear us afterwards; but if we will love Him in the degree that innocent persons do, He will love us as if we were indeed innocent. "He receives the penitent in like manner as He receives the righteous." Oh! what precious comfort for you is here! "He so receives the penitent as He receives the righteous."

5. In proof of this, I am accustomed to make an observation which is not only very striking, but also very well grounded. It is this: that Almighty God has never actually shown to men remarkable for innocence of life any proof of affection which He has not also taken care to show to some of those who, after having despised Him for a long time, returned to His service. Do you doubt it? Only listen, then, attentively; for, if I am not mistaken, you will be consoled by the examples I shall give. The three holy children were not consumed in the flames. How was it with Afra, once an abandoned character, afterward a model of continence? She died, indeed, from a desire to sacrifice herself to God; but the flames did not injure her. The boiling oil, I know, did not injure the innocent St. John; but you are aware that melted pitch did not harm the penitent Boniface. What shall I say of the celebrated Mary of Egypt, of whom I have already spoken in this discourse? Did she not walk several times upon the water, as well as St. Raymond of Pennafort, whose innocence had always been preserved? Did she not remain a long time without nour-

ishment, as well as St. Catharine of Sienna, who had never fallen into sin? The penitent bishop Genebald was brought out from prison by an angel, as well as the innocent virgin Irene. If the innocent Scholastica appeared in the form of a dove to her brother Benedict, was not the case of the penitent Mary, who appeared in this way to her uncle Abram, the same? How much more remarkable it was to be served by a crocodile, as was the repentant Theodora, than to be respected and obeyed by the bears and wolves, as happened to the innocent Agapitus and Norbert! But my story would become too long should I undertake to show that in no degree or kind of privilege have the penitent been surpassed by the innocent; which is the meaning, according to St. Gregory, of the words, "I did eat ashes like bread."* On the other hand, it is enough for me that you shall see, from this slight sketch, how, before God, our past wickedness is as nothing, if only contrition, like a burning flame, has consumed it as it would thorns and brambles, of which no trace is left. But if this is the case, what do you fear, my dearest sinners? Why do you doubt? You are certain that God will not delay to receive you, and to value you as highly as an innocent person; otherwise would His words in Ezechiel be false: "The wickedness of the wicked shall not hurt him, in what day soever he shall turn from his wickedness";† for if from being great sinners you could not become great saints, certainly your past misconduct would indeed have hurt you seriously. Take courage, then, be of good heart, for places are still waiting for you among the greatest of the saints, if you wish to join their number.

6. See now the difference between your way of arguing and mine. You argue that, because you have been great

* Pa. cl. 20.

† Ezech. xxxiii. 12.

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sinners, God would exclude you from the number of His greatest saints; and I argue that God will include you in the number of His greatest saints, because you have been great sinners. Pray listen. You have lived many years in sin. Is it not so? I really feel a difficulty in bringing myself to think so badly of you; but come, let us suppose the fact. Now, for what reason, think you, has God, up to the present, borne with so great patience all your grievous provocations? so many blasphemous words in your loose hours, so many frauds in your legal contracts, so many impieties in your religion, so many oppressions of the poor, so many outrages against the righteous; every one of them sore offences, not to mention others levelled directly against Himself? Was it not, then, in His power to carry you off by death the first time you provoked Him, even in your earliest youth? How many occasions were every day presented to Him of letting you slip down a precipice, or fall from some window, or sink in a river, or be struck by an arrow! And yet He has allowed none of these things to harm you. He has preserved you with a forbearance and with a long-suffering utterly incredible; yea, He has even cherished you with the extreme of loving-kindness. Now, of what is this a sign? It is a sign of His expecting some remarkable return from you by way of compensation. He does not sustain your life, at all this cost to Himself, in order that you may persist in offending Him. It is not for this that He supplies you with fruit in the gardens, to appease your hunger; nor with water in the fountains, to relieve your thirst; nor with breezes on the hills, to refresh your languor. When He confers on you these obligations, His design rather is to move you by a sense of love, that you may avow yourselves to be forcibly won over and subdued by such exceeding kindness, and so led to give your-

selves up as zealously to His service for the time to come as in times past you basely offended Him. Let me never, therefore, hear another word from you betraying the least doubt in your minds whether God have any care and concern for your welfare; for, had He not cared for you in a supreme degree, you would, instead of being here to-day, be now miserably groaning with condemned souls or raving with devils; nor would He have ever prompted you this morning to go and hear the sermon, as one more effort on His part to save your soul.

Besides, have you never heard that the most abandoned and desperate sinners are precisely, of all others, the persons He delights to seek out? "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." * A very intrepid sportsman likes to station his dogs on the spot frequented by the most savage wild beasts. A very clever physician takes a pleasure in employing his science where the patient's case is most deplorable. A very dexterous pilot glories in exercising his skill when the winds are most contrary. A very able advocate prides himself in putting forth his power where the cause is most hopeless. A very experienced farmer rejoices in applying his manures where the soil is the poorest. And so the wretched plight you are in does not scare away God's mercy from you, but rather stimulates His desire to exhibit in your particular case the exquisite nature of His love, and to verify those words of the apostle, "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound;" † provided always you are ready to work together with God, throwing your heart wide open to receive His grace in all its intended fulness.

7. I am quite aware that there will of necessity be much for you to pass through, especially at your first start, in or-

* St. Luke xix. 20.

† Rom. vii. 25.

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der to wean you from all those bad associations, licentious and self-indulgent courses, and dishonest practices, which habit has rendered quite familiar to you. Still, cheer up; for this very circumstance will induce the Lord to welcome you to His arms with more affection and to embrace you with more abundant good-will. That poor prodigal son, in his intense longing for liberty, fancied that, when once far from his paternal home, he would have to enjoy almost a golden age in one continual round of feasts and banquetings, in prosperity without end; but he found at last his golden age reduced to this and nothing more—that he must feed on husks. In the lowest state of remorse and destitution he therefore thought of returning home, of throwing himself at his father's feet, of imploring his forgiveness: "I will arise and will go to my father." * He did not form this admirable resolution from any sense of love or gratitude which he felt. No, sirs; he formed it with a view to his own interest alone, and when he had no other alternative before him. Hunger, nakedness, filth, and misery, these were the motives that drove him back to his home; as St. Peter Chrysologus expresses it, "Famine calls him back whom plenty had sent away." And yet how lovingly was he welcomed home! One might have supposed that at the first sight of him his father would have, in justice, exclaimed, "Ah! ungrateful son, now is thy time, when not a soul is left who cares in the least about thee, for thy coming home. When thou hadst a number of friends, pleasant fare, warm entertainment, it never once occurred to thee to send me even a kind word. Were I to treat thee as thou dost deserve, I should pack thee off at once to those friends in whose company thou hast squandered thy patri-

* St. Luke xv. 18.

mony, and I should leave it to them to save thee from dying of starvation. I might justly shut my door in thy face; I might banish thee from my presence; I might disown thee as my son." It would seem that this good father ought to have addressed him in this manner, at least as a salutary admonition. But he didn't. He preferred acting after the example of the sea, which never upbraids the returning streams of the river because they departed from it and went off such a distance, which never keeps them awaiting its pleasure, never requires of them any supplication, but instantly admits them to their former privilege of mixing with its waters and partaking its benefits. Just so did the good old man instantly spread his arms over the neck of his penitent son, folded him to his bosom, kissed him, bedewed him with his tears. He despatched the servants to bring forth quickly the most splendid apparel for him, to make the table groan under the most sumptuous delicacies, and to get up a concert of the most delectable music. And, which is still more remarkable, he had the ring placed on his finger. "Put a ring on his hand;" for this giving of a ring in trust was in those times the sign of a predilection for the son to whom it was given in preference to the other children. Now my argument on these grounds is this: If any such kind of son—a son, that is, who returns to his father from no other motive or cause whatever than because he feels himself perishing with hunger or dying from cold, is, notwithstanding so poor a motive, received by God with such marked indulgence, what a reception may you, my brethren, hope to obtain who return to Him when at the summit of your worldly success and popularity, in the fullest enjoyment of your riches, your honors, and your pleasures—you who freely renounce all these that you may henceforth live unto God?

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With what affection, then, will He welcome you! With what cordiality! With what eagerness! Will He not most willingly supply you with all the necessary means of attaining that eminent holiness to which your souls aspire, filling you, to say the least, with a lasting sorrow and contrition for your sins; that spiritual nectar, so refined and so delicious, which He promises us by *Isaias*, when He says, "I will water thee with My tears?" *

Margaret of Cortona surrendered herself to follow Christ; and why? because her father had chastised her with a rod; yet Christ did not disdain receiving her as a most cherished friend. Paul, named the simple, surrendered himself too; and why? because his wife had betrayed his honor; yet Christ scrupled not to promote him as a most trustworthy servant. Others devoted themselves to the obedience of God from a mere apprehension of some impending bodily danger; as *Arsenius* the Roman, when he found himself entrapped by *Arcadius*; as *Ephrem* the Syrian, when he saw himself immured in a prison; as *Moses* the Ethiopian, when he perceived himself surrounded by his enemies; as *Gerard* of *Clairvaux*, when he felt himself wounded in battle; as *Romuald* of *Camaldoli*, when he knew himself to be condemned by the magistrates; and, notwithstanding all these low, inferior motives, God thought fit to show these persons His favor and to magnify His affection towards them by raising them to be such distinguished saints. How, then, may we expect Him to act towards you, who, being wealthy, independent, and prosperous in your business, strong and hearty, resolve—all of you—now to return to Him; not (as is evident) from the want of a roof to shelter you, nor from scarcity of food to support you, nor for any apprehension of losing your reputation, nor for any

* *Isaias* xvi. 9.

dread of enemies, nor for any fear of death, nor for any sudden reverse in your circumstances—nor, in short, from any outward pressure and compulsion—but simply because, of your own free choice, you wish to engage in God's service, in preference to that of this vain, transient world, to mortify and to subdue yourselves, and to realize thereby, in your own persons, that miracle of self-abasement, figuratively predicted, when even the lions would one day openly forsake their predatory life, and like so many oxen learn to abhor bloodshed and be content to eat straw—"the lion shall eat straw like the ox?" * How can you possibly suspect that God will turn you adrift, absolutely refuse to receive you with His favor, or show you any tokens whatever of His endearment and love? I submit the whole of my argument to your consideration. If the thing really seems possible, then you have my consent to distrust Him. Still, with every reason we can well conceive to embolden your confidence in Him, why yield to the slightest fear? Why harbor the remotest doubt and suspicion? Why suffer yourselves to be thus kept back from devoting your lives to God, under a firm conviction that, although you are great sinners now, it is yet quite in your power to become as great saints for the time to come?

8. Oh! that you had the ingenuity to elicit from the very fact of your wretchedness a fresh ground of confidence and hope towards God! I find in the Scriptures a most astounding mystery, which has been well pointed out by St. Jerome. The lot of the second-born, it appears, has usually proved more fortunate than the lot of the first-born. Cain was the first-born, yet Abel was more favored than he; Ismael was the first-born, yet Isaac was more favored than he; Esau was the first-born, yet Jacob was more

* Isa. xl. 7.

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avored than he ; Manasses was the first-born, yet Ephraim was more favored than he ; Eliab was the first-born, yet David was more favored than he. I might mention many other examples. Now, I shall feel obliged if any one will inform me what class of persons we are to understand by the first-born ? The first-born are the innocent. So Theophylact, so Tertullian, so St. Cyprian expressly teach me. But without offence to these innocents, let it be said that they are not exalted in the Church of God before the second-born, that is, before the penitents ; as it appears to me, they are rather placed after them. In the church's very highest place I do not observe those two young disciples, those two most innocent souls, but a Peter once a perjurer, and a Paul once a persecutor ; and why so ? It was that no one among us poor, penitent sinners might lose heart, when reflecting on those depths of wickedness in which we were sunk. Oh ! the heights we may ascend to for all this—ay, even we—provided we sincerely wish to be thus exalted ! We, we, I say, though in times past so degraded, have it still in our power entirely to change our condition, to lift our souls to heaven, to outstrip even these innocents, to become saints, to be what our noble-minded Magdalene was to her honor and praise. But to this end what is to be done ? Let us rest awhile, and you shall presently hear.

THE SECOND PART.

9. A calm review of the immense comfort I have now proposed to sinners will prevent your ever supposing me to have hereby given them any occasion to extract poison from what I intended to be medicinal, and to have supplied them with the ground for a presumptuous hope that

they may safely continue in their sin instead of immediately saving themselves from it. Were any of you, however, mad enough to suppose me capable of this, woe be unto him ! On such an individual I should be ready to discharge myself with more than a tiger's fury ; nor would I cease howling in his ears till I made him understand the distinctive mark that separates the elect from the reprobate ; that whereas the elect take encouragement from the Divine mercy to lament their sins, the reprobate grow bold in adding to them. It is one thing to have recourse to the Divine mercy after the commission of sin, and another thing to commit sin because recourse to the Divine mercy yet remains in our power. The first is a wish that God should forgive us our sins ; the second that He should patronize us in them. But because so great a madness, I am sure, cannot possibly enter the mind of any present, I once more address myself to those among you who, being wearied with their past iniquities, are now all longing to return to God and henceforth to serve Him with a degree of fidelity proportioned to the disobedience of their former lives. Plunged as you have been so deep in the sink of vice, by what means will you contrive now to raise your souls to such an elevation of purity and holiness ? Here you will naturally expect that I should advise you by all means to commence your ascent gradually, to begin step by step, to-day to detach yourself from one pleasure, to-morrow from another ; to-day to retire from one society, to-morrow from another, and to proceed in this manner, moving gently onwards towards your perfection. But, excuse me, I propose advising you to adopt quite a different method. So long as you act on this principle you are not relying sufficiently on that Divine grace which is to be your friend and assistant ; nor do you seem to remember

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that not your own feet but His Divine wings are to lift you up to this grand elevation. I must therefore tell you that, if ever you wish to become saints indeed, you must form a noble and daring resolution. The course to be pursued by great sinners differs from that of ordinary men, educated in virtue, or, at least, not habituated to vice. Let these move quickly on, stage by stage, and they may yet, in many instances, reach their perfection ; because they are not retarded at every step they take by the encumbrance of these vicious habits already formed. But, in the case of great sinners, if they do hasten their passage quick over such slippery ground, they soon fall back ; and hence you will find, on further inquiry, that almost all the persons who have raised themselves from the abyss of iniquity to pre-eminent holiness have, so to speak, won the prize by a good, brave, determined leap at first starting. Consider Pelagia, the celebrated sinner of Antioch ; hardly had God touched her heart by the preaching of the bishop, than she determined to have an interview with him. But not being able to see him privately, she went to find him in the public synod, and threw herself at his feet before that august assembly ; and not fearing the jokes of the people and the disdain of those who had previously admired her, she begged with tears of the bitterest compunction the pardon of her sins. Do you think that she afterwards proceeded by degrees, first renouncing unlawful actions, next unseemly words, and then retiring into solitude ; on the contrary, it was only on the third day after her conversion that, having made a faithful inventory of her rich furniture, ornaments, gold, robes, and jewels, she laid it at the feet of him who had subdued her, that they might be distributed among the poor. Then having returned home, she gave all her slaves liberty, and clothed herself from head to foot

in haircloth; and going in this guise, a squalid pilgrim, to Jerusalem, where she venerated the holy places, she shut herself up in a small cell, never leaving it till she was called thence to heaven. What shall I say of Thais of Egypt? She asked from the Abbot Paphnutius, who converted her, only three hours before she shut herself up in a convent of solitaires, to pass her life in a perpetual detestation of the sin which she had committed. And how did she employ those three hours, but in collecting whatever she had received from her admirers, both as gifts and as payment, bringing them together in the public square, and there burning them as the detestable wages of sin? Thus, also, did Galganus, that noble but abandoned youth, become a saint at one leap; he trod the path of virtue so rapidly that to reach the goal he only required one year of an austere and penitent hermit life. Thus, too, at one bound, Margaret of Cortona, and Angela of Foligno rose to sanctity; and William of Aquitaine, who actually boasted of being entirely wicked by nature, falling terrified and confused at St. Bernard's feet, rose changed from a wolf into a lamb, from a persecutor into a penitent. Suddenly he exchanged his riches for poverty, his revelings for hunger, his jests for sobs, and loaded his pampered body with chains. Take courage then, my tenderly beloved fellow-sinners, this is the very enterprise to which I call you this morning; that you would at once decide on making some magnanimous venture for the God you have so deeply injured, and without delay set about it. The grace of the Holy Spirit cannot tolerate our slow, dull pace. His grace does not sanction our tardily-adopted plans. His grace enters the heart, and operates there, like the lightning, which is no sooner born in the clouds than it is impatient to contrive some outlet, some way to accomplish its important designs.

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10. Nor let any fear of your being unable to maintain your steadfastness, in this new choice of a far better life, deter you from entering upon it. For, as it is in your power, with the help of the grace God now gives you, to make a beginning, so you will be able by the same help to make an end. And now, when from a motive of love towards God you have so nobly made up your mind, think you that He will abandon and leave you to yourself? Does He now receive you, being sinners? Is it, then, likely He will cast you off, being penitent? These are His own words, out of His own mouth: "Him that cometh to Me I will not cast out."* Where, for heaven's sake, is the man who buys a field and does not afterwards take care to cultivate it? Or who builds a house, and does not afterwards like to live in it? Observe yonder gardener, who by dint of hard labor has prevailed upon that old stump of a tree to sprout once more. That one particular tree he cherishes beyond all the rest in his garden, that are naturally productive. He waters it more plentifully than he does the others. He is far more careful in keeping it clean, and no sooner does any stranger visit the spot than immediately, as if quite forgetting or totally disregarding the rest, he says to him, "Just look, sir, at that tree!" Why, then, should not God make the same account of you, when He has worked so hard, and taken such pains on your account? At least, if I may so speak, He will love what is the labor and produce of His own hand in you, and, exactly as Tertullian gave his opinion on this point, "He will most dearly cherish what He has Himself acquired." Be of good courage therefore, O my Christians! be of good courage; for I am willing to act as your surety in this matter of the Divine goodness. I will say with Nazianzen:

* St. John vi. 37.

"You may surely reckon on me as your sponsor." If you have not the holy boldness and the courage of the Magdalene to draw near to the feet of Christ, to wash them with your tears, to imprint them with your kisses, I, as your representative, am ready to step forward, and to address the Lord to this effect in your behalf: "Lord, I know that many sinners abuse Thy mercy, and still Thou dost frequently endure them with great patience. This people are not thus minded towards Thee. Their petition to Thee is rather this: that, since Thou endurest the sinner, who can abuse Thy mercy for the purpose of insulting Thee, Thou wilt not reject the sinner who now implores that mercy for the purpose of being converted to Thee. But if in requesting this they are too presumptuous, then it is I, Lord, whom Thou must punish; for I am the person who, without reproving them even once for their offences against Thee, have been doing all I can this morning to comfort and encourage them. But was this not right in me? O adorable mercy! O surpassing loveliness! Sinner as I myself am, yet see how little I dread Thy indignation, how I have spoken out, and publicly confessed before all this people that I too, in my madness, have more than once provoked Thee; yea, have challenged Thee, dared Thee to the combat, and, to crown all, trampled Thy honor under my feet. 'I have sinned, I have done wickedly, I have acted unjustly against all Thy justices,'* and, notwithstanding this, Thou hast not only endured me with extreme forbearance, but hast granted me the gift of repentance. Thou hast placed me among Thy servants, Thou hast enrolled me among Thy priests, Thou hast numbered me among Thy preachers; and if, alas! in this same holy calling, I have made Thee a most unworthy return, my own

* *Baruch* ii. 12.

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unaccountable wickedness is to blame for it, and 'tis no fault of Thine infinite goodness. And now, having thus dealt with me, is it not Thy will that I should go and call every sinner to repentance? Never oughtest Thou to have put me into the ministry, unless with a design that I should fully preach Thy Gospel. And now I more than promise immediate forgiveness of sin to all who seek Thee. I go further. I promise every penitent here present that Thou wilt receive him, as a friend, even such a friend as he desires to approve himself to Thee. I promise him, Thou wilt be his helper under temptations. I promise him Thou wilt be his supporter under difficulties, his defence under dangers, his consolation under fears and discouragements. Lastly, I promise him that, as Thou hast enabled him now to forsake his sins, so Thou wilt enable him no less to persevere for the future." This, O Christians! is the blessing which from this pulpit I assure to you on the authority of St. Paul: "He who hath begun a good work in you will perfect it."* Animated by this express assurance, it remains for you to consider what magnanimous deed you can now perform to evidence your love to that Saviour who, for the love wherewith He loved you, sunk down upon **His Cross** in the agonies of death.

* **Phil. i. 6.**

